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'THIS IS THE TENOUR OF MY WAKING DREAM':
A CRITICAL STUDY OF SHELLEY'S
'THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE'

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED AS A PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR
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MR RICHARD CRONIN

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
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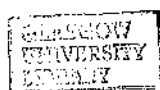
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Abstract

'This is the tenour of my waking dream': A Critical Study of Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life'

Ya-feng Wu

In this doctoral thesis I seek to offer a critical reading of Shelley's last major endeavour, 'The Triumph of Life', through a thorough discussion of the related themes and structures in his earlier works. The thesis first traces Shelley's mediation between his two most abiding inspirations, his 'passion for reforming the world' and his private desire to retreat. This mediation takes the form of a grand dialogue with his predecessors and contemporaries, such as Wordsworth and Byron, a dialogue in which Shelley tries to define his own position through the clashes of opposing viewpoints. A rich intertextuality as a result of the dialogue offers an analogue for Shelley's probing into the psyche through the concentric framework of reverie. His delving into the psychic realm always at the same time opens out into a reflection on the poet's role in history, which is a reflection recurrently dramatised in the figure of history-making, triumphal processions. All these discussions lead to a reading of 'The Triumph of Life', which is structured around the dialogue with the composite figure, Rousseau. In this vision, Shelley engages in a comprehensive investigation into the core of Western civilisation. He seeks to reformulate his earlier visions and to re-orient Dante's trilogy by maintaining his position as a purgatorial exile, where he holds on to a vision which for him is not infernal. This position is adumbrated in the unaccomplished critique of 'self-centred seclusion' in *Alastor*, and is achieved precariously in 'The Triumph of Life', because of the latter's unfinished state. 'The Triumph of Life' has been variously represented by commentators as either a palinode of Shelley's earlier endeavours or as a suggestion of a new direction in his idealism. The thesis attempts to show that it is the appropriate fulfilment of a career in which each of the major poems confronts its own palinode but at the same time maintains an idealism that forever refuses to compromise.

'This is the tenour of my waking dream':
A Critical Study of Shelley's
'The Triumph of Life'

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Introduction

The last major work of Percy Shelley, 'The Triumph of Life', has become, as Tilottama Rajan observes in *The Supplement of Reading*, a 'synecdoche' of Romantic literature. The poem, being an accidental fragment, has established itself as a site of critical contention since its posthumous publication in Mary Shelley's edition of Shelley's poems (1824). Critics' opinions of the poem reflect their attitude towards Shelley's entire literary career and towards Romantic literature as a whole. The view of the poem as an expression of spiritual quietism born out of political despair, the opinion held by M. H. Abrams, sees Shelley gradually jettison his radical idealism and regards his earlier vision of immanent apocalypse as in fact a process of succumbing to mortality. The contrary view of the poem as redemptive, the opinion held by Donald H. Reiman, sees Shelley attempt to redress the less optimistic tone that has permeated his later work and reads 'The Triumph of Life' as registering a new turn in his view of life. On the other hand, the deconstructionists view the poem as the paradigmatic expression either of, as Paul de Man states, the impossibility of meaning and reading, or, as Hillis Miller contends, of the triumph of language over the human intention to master it. This thesis recognises that 'The Triumph of Life' stands as the crux of our understanding of Shelley's career as a poet in the Romantic period, and argues that the three modes of interpretation respectively cannot offer a reading of the poem that is able to accommodate its convoluted structure and themes in their full complexity. This thesis attempts to read 'The Triumph of Life' as embedded in the context of his earlier works and by tracing the development of themes and structure tries to outline the process by which Shelley arrived at his mature vision of life.

The first chapter deals with the recurrent tensions between the fundamental drives in Shelley's works, that is, the 'passion for reforming the world' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*) and the desire to retreat from the world. Shelley attempts to solve the conflict between these two drives by constructing an

ideal community, designed to further the political efficacy of the discourse of sensibility, as in the fragment of the romance, 'The Assassins', in *Laon and Cythna*, and in *Prometheus Unbound*. This project of an ideal community gradually loses its impetus and becomes in fact a community-in-retreat as in the 'Letter to Maria Gisborne', and the poems to Jane Williams. The problematic nature of the project is anticipated yet not fully recognised in *Alastor*, which presents an incomplete critique of the nature of retreat as 'self-centred seclusion', a matter which continues to be a major concern in Shelley's work.

The second chapter discusses Shelley's engagement in a dialogue with his predecessors and contemporaries. From 'A Refutation of Deism' onward, Shelley sharpens his use of the dialogue as a structure to position himself in relation to other poets and in the process of a continuous exchange he articulates his own view of life. Shelley's dialogic engagement with Wordsworth and Byron, to cite the two major figures, is not adequately explained by Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence or by Robinson's study of the Shelley-Byron rivalry. Shelley's dialogue with Wordsworth, as in 'The Assassins', the *Alastor* volume, and *Peter Bell the Third*, remains his major preoccupation, whereas the dialogue with Byron, as in *Julian and Maddalo*, helps him to mould a mode of dialogic inquiry that is completely Shelley's own and that serves as a preparatory model for the grand dialogue in 'The Triumph of Life'.

The third chapter concentrates on the development of Shelley's view of history. Shelley's view of history gradually matures from the discursive argumentation of *Queen Mab* to the foregrounding of the process of history-making in order to reinstate the power of interpretation with the people, poems at the centre of which is a triumphal procession, such as the fragment of 'Charles the First', 'The Masque of Anarchy'. In these works, the dramatisation of historical interpretation highlights the inevitable involvement of individuals in the process of history. Elsewhere, Shelley presents the course of history in the trope of a triumphal procession, as in 'A Philosophical View of Reform', which emphasises the active interdependence of art

and history. Alternatively, Shelley presents a reading of history as a phenomenological event, as in *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*, an event which requires a constant renewal of consciousness and unflinching endurance to confront fluctuations and setbacks. In *Hellas*, Shelley combines these two modes of historical reflection in order to examine the historical course of Liberty in a way that is highly imaginative, rather than discursive, and centres on individual predicaments in the apparently repetitive cycles of regeneration and downfall.

The fourth chapter discusses Shelley's use of reverie as an exploratory mode designed to test the social efficacy of poetry and the poet. Shelley absorbs the advantages offered by the convention of dream vision, that is, biblical authority, self-consciousness in the process of composition and the liminal state of in-betweenness. Furthermore, he converts to his use the self-discovery and reintegration presented in Rousseau's *Rêveries* but rejects Rousseau's contentment in his self-centred reverie. Shelley makes his mode of reverie a triple quest: for the primal unity of the self, as in *Laon and Cythna*, for an unmediated language, as in *Prometheus Unbound*, and for an engagement in direct political action, as in 'The Masque of Anarchy'. Each of these three aims is characterised by an ever stronger desire to bridge the gap between words and action, to charge poetry with a power that is able to bring about the actual amelioration of society.

The final chapter concentrates on 'The Triumph of Life', a work enframed by concentric and parallel reveries which contains at its core a dialogue. The intertextual and dialogic structure of the poem is the culmination of Shelley's earlier endeavours. The dialogic structure continues the experiment begun in *Julian and Maddalo*, in which the Maniac's monologue is presented within a dialogue. It is a grand dialogue modelled both on Rousseau's defensive dialogue with his adversaries and admirers, and on Dante's historical dialogue the dynamism of which depends on a progressive succession from one guiding figure to another. In the composite character of Rousseau, whose configuration draws on Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Wordsworth and Byron, Shelley embarks on an ambitious examination of the intellectual and literary

inheritance of his age, which centres on the ambivalent character produced by Promethean endeavours, of which the most important remains the French Revolution. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, himself a figure divided between the political philosopher of the three 'Discourses' and *The Social Contract*, and the autobiographical writer of *The Confessions*, offers Shelley a matrix for self-examination as well as for the investigation of history. The parallel reveries of the poet and of Rousseau expand the historical investigation to an ontological, epistemological and cosmic scale. Its parallel structure seems to suggest a notion of time that is not linear, for the reverie in the present has its own model in the past, a model whose original authority is affirmed and undermined at the same time as the dreamer in the present (the poet) refuses to adopt the pattern of repetition. This vehement refusal reveals a sense of horror felt by the poet as he begins to recognise the fate which Rousseau has suffered and which awaits himself. Rousseau's deformity resulting from his 'plunging' into the 'living storm' teaches the poet a lesson to 'forbear' to join the dance; however, it is the very deformity that empowers Rousseau to direct and advise the poet to turn from being a spectator to an actor in the procession of Life. In the end, they both come to the realisation that the position of exile is not a consequence of choice but the only alternative to captivity of Life. Throughout Shelley's career, as well as throughout this particular poem, he acknowledges the ultimate beauty and truth expressed in Dante's 'Paradiso', but acknowledges it as a paradise, like the loftiest star pinnacled in the 'intense inane' in *Prometheus Unbound*, which must remain forever unattainable. The only available position for the poet, is located in a purgatorio where he begins and ends his journey and where he finds and holds on to glimmers of hope.

Chapter One: the Theme of Retreat

*I am on a mission--I intend to help end the repetitive syndrome of dictatorship.
I carry my country with me . . . Wole Soyinka in exile*

There exists a recurrent tension in Shelley's life and works between a passion to reform the world and a desire to retreat from it. The conflict manifests itself in the discrepancies between the prose essays, such as *An Address to the Irish People* (1812), and poems such as *Epipsychidion* (1821). The contrary impulses to reform and to transcend the world have become one of the sites of dispute in the appraisal of Shelley. One group of critics questions the validity of Shelley's political commitment by calling attention to his never-abandoned plan to take flight from the tumult of the world. Another attempts to reconcile these two drives in order to consolidate Shelley's political vision.¹ I seek to closely examine the fabric of Shelley's vision as poetically and politically intertwined by tracing the development of his self-positioning as a poet. Shelley attempted to resolve the contradictions first by establishing the

¹ The view of a Shelley, divided between, on the one hand, public and political, and, on the other, private erotic preoccupations, is offered by Floyd Stovall, *Desire and Restraint in Shelley* (Durham NC: Duke UP, 1931), especially pp. 150-1. Milton Wilson also views Shelley as divided between a Platonic poet and a radical poet, *Shelley's Later Poetry: A Study of His Prophetic Imagination* (New York: Columbia UP, 1959), pp. 176-7. Those who maintain an affirmative view of Shelley's radical politics include P. M. S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980), Lawrence S. Lockridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), Michael Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: the Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982). Those who hold that Shelley eventually lapsed into a Byronic despair or arrived at an acceptance of the inescapable limitations of mortality include Charles E. Robinson, *Shelley and Byron: the Snake and the Eagle Wreathed in Fight* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), Jerome J. McGann, "'The Secrets of an Elder Day': Shelley after Hellas", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 15 (Winter 1966), 25-41; Karen A. Weisman, *Imageless Truths: Shelley's Poetic Fictions* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994). Another group of commentators develops the view that Shelley's commitment to social reform gave way to, in William Ulmer's words, an 'apocalyptic desire for otherworldly perfections'. They include Ross G. Woodman, *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1964), pp. 189-98; M. H. Abrams, 'Constructing and Deconstructing', *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, ed., Morris Eaves and Michael Fischer (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986), 127-182, p. 167; see also his article, 'English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age', in *Romanticism Reconsidered*, ed., by Northrop Frye (New York and London: Columbia UP, 1963), pp. 26-72, 53; and also Milton Wilson. For a summary of the critical opinions, see William A. Ulmer, *Shelley's Eros: the Rhetoric of Romantic Love* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), pp. 23-4, note 51.

discourse of sensitivity. To establish the philosophical priority and political efficacy of the discourse remained throughout his career the foundation of his poetic visions. Second, he sought to construct an ideal community, which may function variously as a reservoir of revolutionary fervour and as a refuge for the disillusioned. The first approach is most easily traced in *Alastor*, which contains, yet does not fully recognise, the tensions recurrent in Shelley's later works. The second finds its prototype in the unfinished romance, 'The Assassins', and reaches its climax in *Prometheus Unbound*. In the later stages of Shelley's career, his focus may shift towards a vision of a private paradise as in *Epipsychidion*. But it is the oscillation between the public and the private that continues to dominate Shelley's work. As late as *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley revealed an ever stronger awareness of his failure to resolve the tensions between these two positions.

I. Biographical Account

Shelley's design of an ideal community takes two forms, divided one from another by his departure from England to Italy in early 1818. The first is characterised by actual political involvement, while the second is marked by an attempt to convert his actual exile into a condition productive of active virtue. In other words, his design of an ideal community, when transposed to Italy, assumes the paradoxical character of a 'community-in-retreat'.

Shelley's various designs of a community represent his reaction to major political crises: the campaign for Catholic emancipation in Ireland (from February to April, 1812), the suspension of Habeas Corpus (March 1817), the Peterloo massacre (August, 1819), and the spread of revolutionary activities in continental Europe (1820-21).² The first crisis prompted his trip to Ireland, and

² The biographical account relies largely on Richard Holmes, *Shelley the Pursuit* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1974).

his subsequent establishment of a small household disseminating revolutionary thought in Wales (April 1812) and in Devon (July to August 1812).³ An ideal location for the revolutionary community was not found until the Shelleys left Dublin for the Cwm Elan valley, Wales, in April, 1812. The enclosed valley, with one view opening towards the sea, had consoled Shelley after his expulsion from Oxford in July 1811. The topographical features of the Welsh valley not only influenced his later choices of settlement but recur frequently in his literary works. The Shelleys' next abode was in Lynmouth, Devon (July 1812). The geographical isolation of Lynmouth prompted him to promulgate his political doctrines somewhat eccentrically, sending pamphlets, containing *A Declaration of Rights* (written in March 1812 in support of Catholic emancipation) and *The Devil's Walk*, a broad-sheet ballad of social protest, by means of hot-air balloons and bottles thrown into the sea. In addition to this fanciful display of outrage, he embarked on a more literary project, the writing of *Queen Mab*.⁴ At Lynmouth, Shelley had the assistance of Harriet, her sister, Elizabeth, and the 'sister of his soul', Elizabeth Hitchener. Hitchener joined them at the end of July at Shelley's invitation. Their co-operation was regarded by Shelley as the first step in his revolutionary endeavour, the realisation of a community of like-spirits. However, Hitchener left them in November, before the Shelleys went to London. Temperamental differences and misunderstandings resulted in the disintegration of this, Shelley's first attempt to found a revolutionary community. The experience at Lynmouth, viewed with hindsight, seems to prefigure the later failure at Pisa in 1821.

After the experiment in Devon collapsed, Shelley found compensation in his acquaintance with the Godwins in London (4 October to 13 November, 1812).

³ An ideal community was envisioned as early as January 1812, when Shelley gave the first invitation to Elizabeth Hitchener to join his family in the Lake District. See *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols., ed. Frederick L. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1964), i, 218.

⁴ Meanwhile, his enthusiasm to redress injustice was ignited once again by the trial of the liberal publisher, Daniel Isaac Eaton, who was convicted of sedition for publishing the third part of Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man* (May 1812). Shelley wrote a letter to the judge, Lord Ellenborough and sent it to his publisher, Thomas Hookham, (29 July, 1812).

The small Godwinian circle offered another model for a community of like-minded souls, one which Shelley may have attempted to re-create in the summer of 1816 with Byron in Geneva.

When the second political crisis, the suspension of Habeas Corpus, took place (3 March, 1817), Shelley was engrossed in the legal battle over the custody of his children by Harriet after her suicide. These two events, one public and the other personal, prompted him to adopt a more sophisticated mode of retreat. He gradually began to settle in the literary circle of Thomas Love Peacock at Marlow (March 1817 till early 1818), where he encountered Leigh Hunt and John Keats. At Marlow, Shelley led a semi-retired life, the life, as he himself suggested, of a hermit, but it was here that he wrote and distributed to friends three political pamphlets, including *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the Kingdom* (March), and *An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte* (November). He also began his first epic endeavour, *Laon and Cythna* (March to September), which was sent to press, withdrawn and reissued under the title, *The Revolt of Islam* (January 1818). This period in which he addressed current social issues from within the sheltered environs of Marlow acted as yet another model for the way of life that Shelley would seek repeatedly to re-create. He departed for Italy partly for reasons of health, partly in despair at the political situation in Britain.

Shelley's Italian sojourn (1818 to 1822) is characterised by a ceaseless moving from one place to another until the final settlement at Pisa (January 1820). It was at Pisa that Shelley saw the absolute necessity of building up a community of like minds, or in his own words, a 'society of our own class',⁵ as the best solution to the apparently contradictory needs of his family and of his political engagement. The design gradually gathered momentum after the eventful autumn of 1819. *Prometheus Unbound* (which he started in

⁵ Shelley's letter to Mary, writing during his visit to Byron at Ravenna (15 August, 1821), Jones, ii, 339.

September 1818 and finished in December 1819), presents the blueprint of a select circle in mythologised terms. On a more mundane level, Shelley also expressed nostalgia for a select community in the verse letter to Maria Gisborne (written at the end of June and posted on 1 July, 1820). It is a nostalgia harking back not only to the company of the Gisbornes (at Leghorn, 1819), but to the Marlow circle (1817), the Godwinian circle (in London, 1812), and most importantly to the Byronic summer in Geneva (1816). The vision of an ideal community was firmly formulated when Shelley expounded his view of the historical obligations of the poet in *A Defence of Poetry* (February to March, 1821), in response to Thomas Love Peacock's satirical essay, *The Four Ages of Poetry*. In the *Defence*, Shelley aligns himself with the great tradition of poets, including Homer, Dante and Milton, who acted as the conscience and the 'unacknowledged legislators' of the age. The larger historical context gives impetus to his actual design of a community at Pisa, which would gather together Lord Byron, Leigh Hunt and others in the joint venture of establishing a radical magazine, *The Liberal*, which would express their views on social and political as well as cultural issues. Such a community situated abroad yet disseminating its influence to England, in a sense, unites both Godwin's emphasis on the unfettered employment of reasoning in fireside discussions, and Southey and Coleridge's Pantisocratic schemes (1794). With the publication of *The Liberal* at the core of the project, Shelley attempted to expand the limited influence that Godwin seemed to restrict him to, and to redress the charge of escapism that Pantisocracy incurred and to which his own scheme might seem vulnerable. In spite of the fervour for social justice and liberty, the scheme could not survive the temperamental differences that separated the participants. In March of 1822, Shelley wrote to Hunt intimating his sense of inferiority in the company of Byron:

Particular circumstances,--or rather I should say, particular dispositions in Lord Byron's character render the close and exclusive intimacy with

him in which I find myself, intolerable to me, . . . However, I will take care to preserve the little influence I may have over this Proteus in whom such strange extremes are reconciled until we meet (Jones, ii, 394).

But within a month's time, the Shelleyan household left Byron for San Terenzo (30 April, 1822). After falling out with Byron, Shelley regarded himself as nothing more than the link between the two 'thunderbolts', Byron (the eagle) and Hunt (the wren). In a letter to Horace Smith (29 June, 1822), he forecast the inevitable failure of the alliance (Jones, ii, 442). Ironically, it was the deaths of Shelley and Edward Williams that brought together the separated members of the Pisan circle. They moved with Byron to Genoa in Autumn 1822 and launched *The Liberal*, the first issue of which included Shelley's translation of *Faust* and Byron's *The Vision of Judgement*. *The Liberal* was forced to close after the fourth issue by the final break up of the Pisan circle in July 1823.

Shelley's designs for a community of like-minded people as the basis of his social engagement, since its early forms in Wales and Devon (1812) to the Pisan circle (1822), represent Shelley's persistent attempts to reconcile the apparently contradictory drives in his life and work, the private longing to retreat and the passion to reform the world. The biographical account of his attempts to realise this project runs parallel with the development of the theme of retreat in his poetry, and ultimately the life and the fictions can be understood only in relation to each other.

Shelley's repeated attempts to construct a community in the country away from the oppressive city place him in the tradition of the 'green language' which Raymond Williams sees strongly promoted by poets in the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Raymond Williams's pioneering study, *The Country and the City*, presents the pastoral writing of the pre-Romantic and Romantic poets in the larger context of the opposition between the city and the country, an opposition very much at the centre of western

literature since the Hellenistic period in the third century B.C.⁶ The poetry of Edward Young and Oliver Goldsmith, James Thomson and William Cowper helped the Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth and John Clare, to wrench the pastoral from nostalgia and to transform it into a vehicle for social protest.⁷ The 'Romantic structure of feeling', in Raymond Williams's view, consists in an identification of the poet in a virtual if not actual exile with those dispossessed by the spread of industry and commerce through a 'hidden agenda' which regards the idealised pastoral economy as the social condition for poetry (Williams, p. 79). Shelley's poetic re-creations of an ideal community in the country share the main characteristics of Romantic pastoral poetry. His depiction of the actual native people in the rural landscape where he and the other Romantic poets wandered in solitary and literary meditation also reveals an ambivalence of admiration, envy and reserved disdain. More than any other writers of his time, Shelley's fictional and biographical designs for rural retreat are characterised by a personal poignancy, for they are the complex products of his philosophical conviction, political expediency and private longing. His philosophical anarchism, as Michael Scrivener points out, encouraged him to set up another 'political sphere' as an alternative to the dominant sphere (Scrivener, p. 316). But this constructive project had been from its conception intertwined with a personal desire for flight and retreat. For the unjust neglect of his poetry even at the outset of his literary career prompted him to adopt the attitude of the outsider, even that of an 'outcast', wondering whether he should have 'shrunk from persisting in the task that [he] had undertaken in early life, of opposing [himself], . . . to what [he] esteem[s] misery & vice' and not rather have lived 'in the solitude of the heart' (Shelley's letter to Leigh Hunt, 8 December, 1816, Jones, i, 517). During his residence in Italy, his bitterness at his neglect and his sense of alienation were aggravated by his literal exile.

⁶ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973, rpt. Hogarth P, 1993), p. 78.

⁷ Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), p. 9.

Continuous oscillations between an urge towards engagement and a desire for retirement remain the generating motor of both Shelley's writing and his life.

First of all, Shelley seeks to present retreat as the condition of political engagement, or, in the specific terms preferred by Timothy Clark, to present introspection as the pre-requisite for revolution.⁸ Introspection functions as a fundamental impulse not only in Shelley's philosophical speculations, and in his poetry, but also to an extent in his political writings. Its central position in his works, Timothy Clark maintains, attests to Shelley's subscription to the cult of sensibility, the centrality of which in the years around 1810 has been neglected in recent critical studies (Clark, p. 1). The cult of sensibility represents the aesthetic side of a belief, which has its roots in philosophy. The seventeenth century Cambridge Platonists and philosophers, such as the Earl of Shaftsbury, helped to shift the emphasis from reason to feeling as the foundation of the superiority of humans to other living creatures. Enlightenment thinkers, such as David Hume and William Godwin, advocated a rigorous study of the human mind. For them the mind became an object of empiricist study. These two emphases underpin Shelley's early philosophical writings, which are collected by Mary Shelley under the title of *Speculations on Metaphysics*.⁹ Shelley considers self-analysis to be fundamental to intellectual endeavour. In a review of Thomas Jefferson Hogg's novel, *Memoirs of Prince Alexy Haimatoff*, (written towards the end of 1814), Shelley writes:

the science of mind to which history, poetry, biography serve as the materials, consists in the discernment of shades and distinctions where the unenlightened discover nothing but a shapeless and unmeaning mass (Julian, vi, 176).

⁸ I am indebted to Timothy Clark's reconstruction of the historical context of the cult of sensibility. But I have reservations about his largely positive interpretation. Shelley's poems do not attest to the unproblematic confidence in the creative power of poetry that is needed to support Clark's postulation of a 'politics of desire'. See Timothy Clark, *Embodying Revolution: the Figure of the Poet in Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1989).

⁹ Percy Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, ed., by Mary Shelley, 2 vols., (London: Edward Moxon, 1840), included in Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, ed., *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 10 vols., (London: Ernest Benn, 1926-30). Hereafter this edition is referred to as the Julian edition.

This statement attests to Shelley's belief in self-analysis as a task that devolves upon the 'enlightened' discoverer and marks a shift from his original dismissive attitude towards Rousseau's *Confessions* (Shelley's letter to Hogg, 14 May, 1811, Jones, i, 84)

The philosophical privileging of self-analysis leads Shelley to regard sensibility as a distinguishing characteristic of the poet.¹⁰ His review of Hogg's novel represents the cultivation of sensibility in solitude as an inevitable and necessary part of the poet's education, but the poet equally finds in solitude refuge from the misunderstanding vulgar. The segregation, as it were, of the poet from the rest of the world inevitably brings into question the poet's claim to speak for and to direct the world.

Shelley seeks to avoid the dangers of refined sensibility by insisting on the political efficacy of sensibility. The legitimization of sensibility by means of its political efficacy is the dominant concern in Shelley's literary career. He explicitly expounds it in *A Defence of Poetry*. Among his various sources, Madam de Staël offered Shelley the best model.¹¹ Madam de Staël regards literature as the record of the refined sensibility of the age and argues that the foremost task of the poet is to create a balanced reciprocity between literature and society. Shelley gains support from Madam de Staël for his belief in the possibility of a union between the personal and the public, and he goes further in representing the poet as the 'legislator' of his age. 'Legislator', as Dawson maintains, in the contemporary sense, indicates a representative of the true interests of the people (Dawson, p. 221), but it also carries our sense of the legislator as the maker of laws. But Shelley's recognition that the legislator

¹⁰ The alliance between the Man of Feeling and the Wise Man is evident in Godwin's *Fleetwood, or the New Man of Feeling* (1805), in Hume's writings, and in Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771). See Clark, pp. 46-7.

¹¹ Madam de Staël, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, 2 vols (Paris, 1800). For a detailed discussion of the sources of *A Defence of Poetry*, see Kenneth Neill Cameron, *Shelley's Golden Years* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1974), p. 605.

must remain 'unacknowledged' reveals that his self-image continues to be problematised by his self-positioning in solitude. The cult of sensibility does not, as Timothy Clark argues, reconcile the contradictions in Shelley's works. It only shows the relentless potency of the contradictions in which Shelley found himself ever more deeply entangled.

II. Pre-Italian Period

Attached from principle to peace, despising and hating the pleasures and the customs of the degenerate mass of mankind, this unostentatious community of good and happy men fled to the solitudes of Lebanon.

The unfinished romance, 'The Assassins', though little studied, occupies a prototypical place in Shelley's works. This fragment marks Shelley's attempt to confront contemporary issues imaginatively rather than discursively.¹² The location chosen for the romance, a fertile valley in Lebanon, becomes the locus for historical and intertextual inscriptions. The romance serves as a paradigm of Shelley's design for an ideal community, against which his subsequent treatment of the theme is to be gauged.

Shelley began to write this romance during his European trip with Mary from August to September, 1814, and later resumed it in London around April 1815.¹³ The romance consists of four chapters, the fourth of which is left

¹² A revised version of this section on 'The Assassin' has been accepted for a forthcoming issue of the *Keats-Shelley Review*, no. 9 (1995), under the title, "'The Assassins': Shelley's Appropriation of History'. Criticism of 'The Assassins' remains mainly source hunting. See Newman Ivey White, *Shelley*, 2 vols., (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), i, 357; Kenneth Neill Cameron, pp. 603-4, notes 81-2; and Richard Holmes, p. 243, note. For the dating of this fragment see E. B. Murray, 'The Dating and Composition of Shelley's "The Assassins"' in *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 34 (1985), 14-7. The most recent study of this romance is Michael James Neth, 'The Active Ideal: Mind and History in Shelley's *Hellas*', (doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 1990). Neth reads this romance, in relation to *Hellas*, as evincing Shelley's fundamental idea of the community, which is constructed and strengthened on the basis of interpenetration between individuals and their society, and between art and social order.

¹³ According to Mary's journal, Shelley started to write the romance at Brunnen, on 25 August, 1814, and continued to work on it on their return journey to England in September. The final date on which the romance is mentioned is 8 April, 1815, when they

unfinished. The first chapter establishes the Assassins as ardent speculators, 'a little congregation of Christians', whose uncompromising adherence to human understanding as the 'paramount rule of human conduct' is inspired and sustained by the 'chaotic solemnity of nature'.¹⁴ Their unbending principles prompt persecution in a society dominated by superstition and despotism, and they are finally forced out of Jerusalem to seek refuge in the Lebanese valley. Shelley sees the Roman empire which ruled over the Assassins as the prime example of an oppressive society, whose decline proves to be a tragedy for the whole human race:

Rome was now the shadow of her former self . . . The ruins of the human mind, more awful and portentous than the desolation of the most solemn temples, threw a shade of gloom upon her golden palaces which . . . the mighty felt with inward trepidation and despair.

After establishing contrasting pictures of Rome in its past aspiration and its present decline, Shelley describes in the second chapter the Assassins' cultivation of their 'fertile valley' over four centuries. This valley gives a geographical reality to the poignant contrast between the secluded community of the Assassins and the 'corrupt and slavish' multitude outside. The Assassins' community is characterised by harmony and equality, for they form 'one being' and their 'republic' is governed by the principles of 'justice and benevolence', defined by Shelley in a utilitarian manner with reference to the 'greatest pleasure'. Such a community, Shelley remarks, exemplifies the teaching of their 'illustrious master' (Jesus Christ). But theirs is a Christianity purged of the passive Christian virtues: 'No Assassin would submissively temporise with

were living in London. See *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, ed., Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1987), i, 19, 73. Hereafter Mary's journal is referred to as Mary.

¹⁴ Quotations from Shelley's prose works are drawn from *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed., by E. B. Murray (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993), vol. i. The romance is from pp. 124-39. I have also consulted *Shelley's Prose or The Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed., by David Lee Clark, corrected edn., London: Fourth Estate, 1988, originally prt., Albuquerque: the University of New Mexico Press, 1966), pp. 144-154.

vice, . . . His path through the wilderness of civilised society would be marked with the blood of the oppressor and the ruiner'.

The romance proper begins with the third chapter, about six hundred years after the Assassins have settled in the Lebanese valley. A wounded wanderer falls from the rocks into the vale. He is received by the family of Albedir and Khaled. The fourth chapter tells us of his visit with the couple to a precipice overlooking a lake, on whose shore their children are playing with a snake. At this point, the fragment breaks off.

This visit of the wanderer is placed in the relatively recent past (at the end of the seventeenth century),¹⁵ which indicates that Shelley is concerned to bring the legend closer to his own time so as to draw a parallel between the situations of the Assassins, who have retreated from an oppressive society, and that of those in his own time who have sought to preserve their ideals in the face of the historical defeat that those ideals appeared to have suffered.

There are four possible sources for Shelley's knowledge of the Assassins and his reconstruction of their community. First is the sixty-fourth chapter of Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which Mary refers to in her journal (Mary, p. 43). In this chapter, Gibbon chronicles the conquests of Zingis Khan and his successors in Asia and Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. During his account of the ruthless conquests of the Moguls, Gibbon describes the 'extirpation' of the Assassins which he judges to be 'a service to mankind'. Gibbon regards this Islamic sect, which was led by 'the old man (as he was corruptly styled) of the mountain', as 'odious' sectarians. In Gibbon's view, the genocide of the Assassins seemed a blessing: 'these daggers, [the old man's] only arms, were broken by the sword of Holagou, and not a vestige is left of the enemies of mankind, except the

¹⁵ The romance begins with the first siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., which Shelley read about in Tacitus's *History*. See Mary (24 August, 1814), p. 19. The Assassins were settled at Alamut in 1090. It is six hundred years later, at the end of the seventeenth century, that the wounded wanderer enters the valley.

word *assassin*, which, in the most odious sense, has been adopted in the languages of Europe'.¹⁶ Gibbon offers a general background for Shelley's romance, but Shelley reverses Gibbon's judgement of the Assassins.¹⁷

A more contemporary source is *Le vieux de la montagne*, written by Delisle de Sales (published in 1799).¹⁸ Delisle, a philosopher of nature, presents the story of the Assassins' leader, Hasan-e Sabbah, as offering a timely lesson for France after Bonaparte's conquest of Egypt.¹⁹ Delisle considers the regime of 'le vieux de la montagne' as a 'tyrannie qui n'est étayée de tout le génie du despote que pour forcer au crime son âme généreuse, et du sein même de ses succès faire sortir ses revers'.²⁰ This tyranny is set in a sharp contrast with 'un gouvernement libre, le seul dont l'espèce humaine s'honore, . . . en harmonie avec les étrangers et avec elle-même . . .'.²¹ In Delisle's view, the Assassins were indoctrinated into being 'un peuple purement passif, instrument servile des volontés de son Souverain'.²² Denouncing the use of assassination as a means to enforce governmental policy, Delisle presents 'l'amour éternel' (eternal love) as 'le remède véritable' (the veritable remedy) for all contentions. The love between the two characters, Ariel and Bouton de Rose, serves as an example. Both are born 'dans des îles obscures de la mer intérieure' (on the obscure isles of the interior sea). Ariel, who is 'à la fois petit et grand' (at once

¹⁶ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 12 vols. (London: Lackington, Allan & Co., 1815), xi, 417.

¹⁷ The story of the old man of the mountain had a special appeal for the Romantic poets. Walter Edwin Peck suggests that this story lies behind Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'. See *Shelley: His Life and Work*, 2 vols., (Boston: Noughton Mifflin, 1927), i, 386-7.

¹⁸ Both Cameron and Holmes suggest this source. Holmes suggests that Shelley might have picked up this book, published in 1799, during the week he spent in Paris, 1814. See Holmes, p. 243, note. However, I could not find any material to support Holmes's claim that the leader of the Assassins, Hasan e-Sabbah, was brought up by a mystic sub-cult of primitive and communist Christians known as the Druse who lived in a secret valley of the Lebanon.

¹⁹ Pièrre Malandain, *Delisle de Sales: Philosophe de la nature* (1741-1816), 2 vols. (The Voltaire Foundation: at the Taylor Institute, Oxford, 1982), i, 409-416.

²⁰ In my own translation: a tyranny which is supported by all the genius of the despot only to enforce the crime of his generous soul, and even from the heart of the successes unleashes its defeats.

²¹ A free government, the only one in which the human race honours itself . . . in harmony with foreign countries as well as with itself.

²² A people purely passive, a servile instrument of the wills of its sovereign.

small and great), suggests Bonaparte, and is actually called 'Bonih-Phrath' in the land of the Pyramids. Delisle's story seems designed to encourage Bonaparte to aspire higher than the mere military conquest of Egypt. The true and everlasting trophies, Delisle suggests, are won by reviving the ancient societies of arts and knowledge in Memphis. Furthermore, the mountain stronghold at Alamut, for Delisle, serves as a platform from which the whole passage of history may be reviewed. From Delisle, Shelley grasps the possibility of using the history of the Assassins to prompt a general meditation on the course of human history while still insisting on a sharp contemporary relevance.

The third source for Shelley is Samuel Johnson's *The History of Rasselas: Prince of Abissinia: A Tale* (1759). As Newman Ivey White suggests, the 'happy valley' in Johnson's *Rasselas* is a place secluded geographically from the outside world (White, i, 357). The dwellers within this valley-kingdom remain contented, except for the young Prince, who on reaching his twenty-sixth year escapes from his private palace in the valley to discover the outside world. Johnson's tale concludes with the Prince and his companions stranded in Egypt by the Nile in flood dreaming of their return to Abyssinia. Kenneth Cameron suggests another source for the valley in Marco Polo's *Travels*, the garden in a valley built by the Old Man (the Sheikh).²³ The garden, according to Marco Polo, functions both as a reward for and a means to control the Sheikh's followers.

Historically, the Assassins were a religiopolitical Islamic sect that flourished from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries.²⁴ They separated themselves from the mainstream Islamists in a succession dispute by giving their allegiance to Nizar. In 1090, their leader, Hasan-e Sabbah, established his stronghold at

²³ Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans., by Ronald Letha (London: Penguin, 1958), pp. 70-1. See Cameron, pp. 603-4, notes 81-2.

²⁴ My knowledge of the Assassins largely depends on Enno Franzius, *History of the Order of Assassins* (New York: Funk & Wagnal, 1969), pp. 25-9. See also Mircea Elisade, et al. ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), i, 469-70.

Alamut in the Elburz Mountains, south of the Caspian sea. Hasan-e Sabbah, a charismatic and authoritarian leader, protected his sovereign by training devoted soldiers to carry out the assassination of his enemies. The name, 'Assassin', in its Arabic origin, means a 'hashish smoker', referring to their alleged practice of taking hashish to induce ecstatic visions of paradise before setting out to face martyrdom. Hasan's fearful reputation as 'the old man in the mountain' was spread to Europe by the Crusaders. Anecdotes concerning Hasan-e Sabbah are often confused with those about a later Assassin leader Sinan (1162-76), who established another mountain citadel at Khaf in the Ansaria Mountains, between the Orontes River and the Mediterranean Sea (that is, the same region as the Lebanese valley). Contrary to what Gibbon records, after the conquest of Holagu Khan in 1256, the Assassins were not eradicated but went underground. Nowadays, their followers still exist in Iran, Afghanistan and India. Their religion, in its earliest form, cherished intellectual speculation in contrast with the mainstream Islamic teachings. The Assassin doctrine allowed its advanced members to ignore Islamic rituals, whose literal interpretation was regarded as intended only for the uneducated. The advanced members were directed to study Greek philosophy and were required to submit to no authority but their own reason. The hierarchical structure of the Assassins' society, at odds with Islam which was essentially egalitarian, together with their allegiance to their own leaders, made them a target for theological attacks and political persecution in the Sunni Turkish dynasty of the Seljuqs. But the authoritarian regime of Hasan-e Sabbah necessarily acted as a curb on the speculative nature of their doctrine.²⁵

The Assassins' insistence on the virtue of free speculation secures Shelley's approval of their society, an approval which he maintains by ignoring their less acceptable practices. To set up his historical scene, Shelley conflates two

²⁵ The authoritarian emphasis dominated Assassinism even after Hasan II (1162-1166) declared their independence from the Sunnites by inaugurating the Resurrection and elevating himself as Mahdi or Kaim (bringer of the Resurrection).

sieges of Jerusalem: the first by the Roman army under the leadership of Titus in 70 A. D., which Shelley would have known from Tacitus,²⁶ the second by the Crusaders in 1099. Like Gibbon, he understands the Assassins as a product of the Crusades, the first great historical convergence of Western and Eastern cultures, philosophies and religions. But in contrast to Gibbon, Shelley directs his sympathy towards the people of the East, by depicting the Roman army as barbarian invaders in comparison with the culturally and spiritually superior Assassins. The confrontation of Christians and non-Christians allowed the possibility of a cultural interchange that might produce new religious credos and practices. Unlike the Crusaders, Shelley crosses the boundaries not to conquer the Pagans, but in order to suggest the possibility of reconciling the best qualities of both religions. He envisages his heroes as Arabian Christians, possessing only the positive characteristics of both. The Assassins are introduced as a 'little congregation of Christians'.²⁷ Their credo resembles that of the Gnostics and is in accord with the original teaching of Jesus Christ. The reference to Gnosticism offers a historical anchor for the Assassins' 'intrepid spirit of inquiry' which is 'superior in singleness and sincere self-apprehension to the slavery of pagan customs and the gross delusions of antiquated superstition'. The reference to Christianity suggests a community of equality and love resembling the early Christian communes. On the other hand, their Arabian qualities enable them to 'idolise nature and the God of nature'. Their 'fervid imaginations', inspired and sustained by their natural seclusion, maintain their purity. The term, 'Arabian Christians', works to blur the distinction between Islam and Christianity and also to liberate Shelley's Assassins from any limiting sectarian allegiance. Both manoeuvres, the conflation of history

²⁶ Cornelius Tacitus, *Tacitus: The Works of Cornelius Tacitus*, 8 vols., trans., by Arthur Murphy (London: John Stockdale, 1805-7), vi, 343-5.

²⁷ However, Mary shows herself aware of Shelley's confusion when she describes the Assassins as a 'horde of Mahometans living among the recesses of Lebanon--ruled over by the Old Man of the Mountain . . .' See Mary's notes to *Essays* (1840), in Julian, vol. v, p. ix.

and combination of religions, assist Shelley in his transformation of the Assassins from tyrannical murderers into fighters against tyranny.

The full significance of Shelley's reworking of his materials becomes clear only by reference to the historical moment of the fragment's composition. In the summer of 1814, the Europe that Shelley visited with Mary and Claire was devastated by the prolonged wars between Napoleon and the allied forces. The military expansions of Napoleon since 1798, in the eyes of British radicals, such as Coleridge and Wordsworth, had amounted to an utter betrayal of the French revolutionary ideals. Shelley witnessed personally the devastation of the people as he travelled through the war-torn areas on the borders between France and Switzerland. As Mary notes in the *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (published in 1817), the ravages of war forced them to confront history even when they were actually enjoying their 'honeymoon'. Mary writes:

we now approached scenes that reminded us of what we had nearly forgotten, that France had lately been the country in which great and extraordinary events had taken place. Nogent, a town we entered about noon the following day, had been entirely desolated by the Cossacs . . . perhaps they remembered Moscow and the destruction of the Russian pillages, but we were now in France, and the distress of the inhabitants, whose houses had been burned, their cattle killed, and all their wealth destroyed, has given a sting to my detestation of war, which none can feel who have not travelled through a country pillaged and wasted by this plague, which, in his pride, man inflicts upon his fellow.²⁸

Mary's perceptions are confirmed by Shelley's letter to Harriet Westbrook (13 August, 1814). The experience exerted a profound influence on them both. On the one hand, the defeat of Napoleon in 1814 inflected Delisle's book, which was written at the outset of Bonaparte's Egyptian expedition, with a grim historical irony. Napoleon's betrayal of *les beaux idéals* had by then come home to Shelley. On the other hand, the restoration of conservative regimes throughout Europe seemed bound to perpetuate the deprivation and inequality equally apparent both in France and in Ireland.

²⁸ Mary Shelley and P. B. Shelley, *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817), (Oxford and New York: Woodstock Books, 1991), p. 19. This book is hereafter referred to as *Mary, Tour*.

It is against this background that Shelley writes his romance. In the legend of the Assassins he found a model indicating how hope might be maintained at a time when the forces of reaction seemed triumphant. He read his sources against the grain in order to mould the community of the Assassins into a republic of free individuals. In Shelley's romance, the agnostic nature of their religion and their economic system based on an equal share of labour and property materialise what he had earlier depicted in *Queen Mab* as the vision of the 'happy earth'. The Lebanese valley of the Assassins thus amounts to a utopia on earth, preserving the ideals of the French Revolution, which had been abandoned in the actual course of history.

Shelley reverses Gibbon's verdict on the Assassins by representing them as 'merciful destroyer[s]', who sweep from the world the perverse and vicious (Murray, *Prose*, p. 132). Their violence is justified as a manifestation of their uncompromising conscience.²⁹ But as the centuries passed, they have remained secluded in their valley, and have lost their capacity for active indignation. Shelley allows a wanderer to penetrate their valley, who will function to re-awaken them to a true sense of their historic role.

While remodelling his heroes from historical materials, Shelley draws on the idea of nature as exerting beneficent influences on the human mind. The landscape described in the romance actually recalls Shelley's experience in Switzerland. On his short sojourn in Switzerland, Shelley was delighted to recognise Lake Lucerne, surrounded by the Alps, as a place where revolutionary activities had been launched to overthrow a tyrannical government. As Mary notes in her book: 'indeed this lovely lake, these sublime mountains, and wild forest, seemed a fit cradle for a mind aspiring to high adventure and heroic deeds . . .' Appropriately, it was on the shore of Lake Lucerne that Shelley read the account of the siege of Jerusalem in Tacitus

²⁹ Shelley's justification of violence suggests a parallel with the Wordsworth of 1793 who wrote the 'Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff', which remained unpublished. However, it is a parallel that was never revealed in their lifetime.

(Mary, *Tour*, pp. 49-51). The conjunction of geographical sites, textual encounters (Tacitus, Gibbon and Delisle), and political events prompts Shelley to envisage the valley as a revolutionary stronghold for his race of heroes.

Shelley employs the Romantic discourse of nature to rescue the Assassins from their historical disrepute as fanatic murderers. Their retreat in the 'fertile valley' is divested of all the negative qualities emphasised in Marco Polo's *Travels* and Johnson's *Rasselas*. Their community is a republic operating under the principles expounded by Rousseau, Godwin and Bentham. It is not sufficient that this republic operates as a utopia in miniature: it must become the centre of a grand enterprise, the end of which must be a republic of the world. It is for this reason that Shelley introduces the wanderer in order to reawaken the sensibility and moral vigour of the Assassins, which have been dulled by the 'necessity of daily occupation and the ordinariness of that human life' (Murray, *Prose*, p. 129).

The wanderer is modelled partly on the legendary Hasan e-Sabbah and Sinan, partly, as Mary notes, on Shelley's favourite motif, the Wandering Jew (Julian, vol. v, p. ix). The former is suggested by the wanderer's princely status and his clairvoyant and charismatic ability and the latter by his vehement denunciation of tyranny that recalls Ahasuerus as he is described in *Queen Mab*. The wanderer's unflinching struggle against an unnamed tyrant indicates Shelley's attempt to keep his romance free from specific historical reference, thus maintaining its permanent relevance.

Shelley envisages his heroes and heroines not only preserving their hope in *les beaux idéals* but willing to emerge from their retreat to participate in the ongoing struggle for Liberty. The romance, though unfinished, has a seminal significance in Shelley's work, for it registers for the first time in Shelley's career his recognition that to attempt to maintain revolutionary values in the years of post-war reaction was at once a political and a literary project. In 'The Assassins', Shelley deploys the technique of constructing fictions that will act

as an aggressive and ironic revision of fictions of the past that was to serve him throughout his career. This unfinished romance presents an originary and deceptively positive paradigm. It is originary because from it Shelley develops his blueprint of an ideal community in retreat reserving energy for revolutionary enterprise. It is deceptively positive because Shelley fails in later works to recapture such an unproblematised vision of an ideal community.

Among those who attempt to exist without human sympathy, the pure and tender-hearted perish through the intensity and passion for their search after its communities, when the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself felt.
Preface to *Alastor*

Shelley's project for an ideal community is problematised almost at its inception. After offering a positive model in 'The Assassins', Shelley began to ponder on the philosophical validity and psychological consequence of his own project. In *Alastor*, he explores the danger of refined sentiment, a dilemma which he never succeeded in resolving.³⁰

In *Alastor*, Shelley's investigation into his project remains an unresolved critique. The critical stance is established in the Preface, but is gradually destabilised in the process of telling the story of the Wandering Poet and finally comes to its dissolution at the end of the poem. In the Preface, the author sets out to establish a contrast between two kinds of decay and death: one is embodied by the Wandering Poet, whose mind is 'suddenly awakened' by nature and who 'thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to [his own]'. He images to himself 'the Being' whom he loves and unites these requisitions and attaches them to a 'single image'. His quest for such a companion, a perfect

³⁰ Mary notes: 'the various ills of poverty and loss of friends brought home to him the sad realities of life. Physical suffering had also considerable influence in causing him to turn his eyes inward; inclining him rather to brood over the thoughts and emotions of his own soul than to glance abroad, and to make, as in *Queen Mab*, the whole universe the object and subject of his song.' See *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed., Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford UP, 1904), corrected by G. M. Matthews, (London: Oxford UP, 1970), p. 30. Hereafter this edition is referred to as Matthews, *Shelley*.

embodiment of sensibility, is regarded as both cause and effect of a 'self-centred seclusion', for which he is punished by the 'furies of an irresistible passion' who pursue him to a 'speedy ruin'. The demise of the Wandering Poet is contrasted with the moral death of those possessed of 'meaner spirits', those who keep 'aloof from sympathies with their kind'. The contrast works to establish from the outset a reserved sympathy with the Wandering Poet. But his death, caused by the 'intensity and passion' of his search for a community, is not naively admired. The author reveals his reservations in his denunciation of the 'unforeseeing multitudes':

They who, *deluded* by no generous error, *instigated* by no sacred thirst of doubtful knowledge, *dured* by no illustrious superstition, . . . yet keep aloof from sympathies with their kind, . . . have their apportioned curse (my emphases)³¹

The Preface works to frame the poem in a bifurcated perspective that accommodates both celebration and denunciation. Moreover, it is an unbalanced and fluctuating bifurcation. The Preface prefigures the oscillation between sympathetic and ironic tones evident in the poem itself.³²

The ironic tone charts the Wandering Poet's degradation in both body and mind in parallel with his acute alienation from any human communities and from nature. The poet's journey is prompted by a sense of isolation: 'When

³¹ For Shelley's poems and prose, I have also consulted *Shelley's Poems and Prose*, ed., Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York and London, 1977). This quotation is from p. 31. Hereafter this edition is referred to as *SPP*.

³² Wasserman maintains that Shelley keeps a conscious distinction between the Wordsworthian narrator, and the Wandering Poet who is an idealist visionary, and argues that the poem presents a dialogue between these two positions. Wasserman admires the 'controlled ambiguity' with which Shelley maintains two equally probable and doubtful positions. See Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins UP, 1971), pp. 1-41, especially pp. 12, 39. I would argue for a less clear division between the narrator and the Wandering Poet than that maintained by Wasserman. My approach is closer to Tilottama Rajan's. Rajan points out that the poem develops as the narrator's ambivalent attitude towards the Poet evolves, and ends in a collapse of his critical stance. I agree with Rajan that the Wandering Poet does not exist on the same ontological level as the narrator for the former is a product of the latter's mind. See Rajan, 'Idealism and Scepticism in Shelley's Poetry' ['The Triumph of Life' and *Alastor*], from *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1980), pp. 58-83, rpt., in Michael O'Neill, ed. *Shelley* (London: Longman, 1993), pp. 241-63.

early youth had passed, he left / His *cold* fireside and *alienated* home / To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands' (ll. 75-7, my emphases). After his encounter with the veiled maid, the once familiar communion between nature and his mind ceases. His search for the 'bright shadow of the lovely dream' (l. 233) gradually takes on the aspect of a flight, a flight from anything which fails to supplement the intolerable void left by the veiled maid.

Red morning dawned upon his flight,
Shedding the mockery of its vital hues
Upon his cheek of death (ll. 238-9).

Nature has been transformed from a source of comfort to an agent of mockery. The incongruity between his deathly features and the radiant morning becomes poignant when his body still shares in the seasonal rhythms that unite it with the natural world: his 'scattered hair / Sere'd by the autumn of strange suffering / Sung dirges in the wind' (ll. 248-50). The mutual sympathy between him and autumn prefigures his death, as the earlier reference to his grave shows: 'the charmed eddies of autumnal winds / Built o'er his mouldering bones a pyramid / Of mouldering leaves in the waste wilderness' (ll. 52-4). This correspondence, which appears on the narrative level of the poem and thus remains unknown to the Wandering Poet, presents the narrator's diagnosis of the Poet's seclusion. Furthermore, the 'red morning' harks back to the 'red morning' when the Arab maiden returns to her 'cold home' (ll. 137-9). The colour of the morning corresponds, in mockery, with the 'flushed' cheeks of both the Arab maiden and the poet. The resemblance reveals how the Poet, like the Arab maiden he ignored, has himself become the victim of unrequited love, and thus, in a sense, the vengeance of 'the spirit of sweet human love' (l. 203) is already completed. The mechanism of revenge is introduced here to externalise the critical stance of the narrator. However, the cause of the malaise, in the eye of the narrator, the Poet's rejection of the Arab maiden's love, remains unknown to the Poet. Even her love remains unknown to him.

In this light, the mechanism of revenge betrays the narrator's anxiety to place the poet within a sharply critical moral scheme in order to smuggle in his increasing sympathy for him.

The sense of irony increases as the Wandering Poet encounters a swan. Its flight towards its nest makes him realise the extent of his own alienation both from nature and from the human community:

'Thou hast a home,
Beautiful bird; . . .
And what am I that I should linger here,
With voice far sweeter than thy dying notes,
. . . wasting these surpassing powers
In the *deaf* air, to the *blind* earth, and heaven
That *echoes* not my thoughts?' (ll. 280-90, my
emphases).

These exclamations express his awareness for the first time of his own predicament. But this awareness only prompts him to seek his love in the realm of 'silent death' (l. 293). He enters a little shallop, ready to meet his beloved in death: 'Calm and rejoicing in the fearful war / Of wave ruining on wave . . . he sate' (ll. 326-9). His quasi-heroic stature is undermined by the narrator's insistence that his journey is not a quest but a flight:

As one that in a silver vision floats
Obedient to the sweep of odorous winds
Upon resplendent clouds, so rapidly
Along the dark and ruffled waters *fled*
The straining boat (ll. 316-20, my emphasis).

The heroic voyage becomes an involuntary flight, as the boat 'fled' before the storm like a 'torn cloud'. The wandering poet's quest for a union with his beloved is thus exposed as at once a flight from death-in-life and a quest for life-in-death.

The sense of irony increases as the poet's narcissistic tendency begins to dominate. He is so unresponsive to the natural world around him that he becomes a disturbance to the cove (l. 412), an 'unaccustomed presence' to the

dark fountain (l. 477). The decisive moment in the process of complete self-seclusion comes when he encounters a vision of his love.

Hither the Poet came. His eyes beheld
Their own wan light through the reflected lines
Of his thin hair, distinct in the dark depth
Of that still fountain; as the human heart,
Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave,
Sees its own treacherous likeness there.
... A Spirit seemed
To stand beside him--clothed in no bright robes
...
Borrowed from aught the visible world affords
Of grace, or majesty, or mystery;--
But, undulating woods, and silent well ...
... for speech assuming
Held commune with him, *as if* he and it
Were all that was, ... (ll. 469-488, my
emphases).

The poet is initiated into the encounter when he gazes on the reflection of his own eyes. He responds by recognising the true status of the light: 'Obedient to the light / That shone within *his soul*, he went, pursuing / The windings of the dell' (ll. 492-4, my emphases). The encounter with the vision of his beloved is thus framed by the two references to his self-absorption which question the validity of the encounter by representing it as an event that has no existence outside the poet's own mind. The 'commune', which the poet believes that he is holding with the Spirit of the veiled maid in the guise of nature, collapses into a recognition of his own narcissism. The veiled maid, having a voice like the voice of the poet's own soul (l. 153), is now further diminished into an apparition of his inner light. It is this recognition that prompts the poet's address to the stream:

'O Stream!
Whose source is inaccessibly profound,
Whither do thy mysterious waters tend?
Thou imagest my life. Thy darksome stillness,
Thy dazzling waves, ...
Have each their *type* in me, ...' (ll. 502-8,
my emphases).

Nature becomes merely a mirror of the Wandering Poet's mind. Furthermore, the poet insists on seeing his mind as the origin of external objects. This recognition functions as a double-edged sword, for it shows the poet's mature recognition of his own introjection, his excessive concentration on the image of things, rather than the things themselves. The introjective energy prompts his quest and also seals his destiny because it leads to a deadly self-absorption that refuses anything except what can be recognised as an image of the self.

The Wandering Poet finally dies on 'the threshold of the green recess', '[u]pon an ivied stone / Reclined his languid head, his limbs did rest, . . . on the smooth brink / Of that obscurest chasm' (*ll.* 625, 634-7). Earlier he had foreseen the manner of his own death, after the visionary encounter with the veiled maid: 'when stretched / Upon thy flowers my bloodless limbs shall waste / I' the passing wind!' (*ll.* 512-3). In this sense, the poet recognises the course of his life as a circle that becomes the figure for his own self-absorption and self-dissolution.

During every stage of the Poet's quest, the narrator watches over as a superintending presence. His judgements are not straightforward but come as a result of negotiations between the Poet's view and his own view. The sense of irony is seriously undermined by a growing pressure of sympathy, and the narrator eventually bursts out into a lamentation for the death of the Poet. The ambiguity is finally spelled out in the death scene and in the narrator's invocation to Medea. The Poet's blood which has 'ever beat in mystic sympathy / With nature's ebb and flow' is now quenched in the 'stagnate night' (*ll.* 652-7). The stagnation of night prefigures the emptiness of nature after the poet dies, which mirrors the vacancy felt by the Poet after the departure of the veiled maid. The fact that the night becomes 'stagnate' in the eye of the narrator suggests that the narrator now identifies himself with the Poet. The 'two lessening points of light' gleaming amid the darkness might represent meteors, indicating the belated sympathy of nature; or the eyes of the veiled

maid, beckoning him towards their final union; or they might represent the reflection of the Poet's own eyes in the sky, lingering to protest against the futility of his life-long quest. The two lights recall the Poet's impatient listlessness after the departure of the veiled maid:

His wan eyes
Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly
As ocean's moon looks on the moon in heaven
(*ll.* 200-2).

At last, the narrator presents the Poet as sharing the fate of the archetypal wanderer, Ahasuerus, who has become 'a vessel of deathless wrath, a slave that feels / No proud exemption in the blighting curse / He bears, over the world wanders for ever, / Lone as incarnate death!' (*ll.* 678-81). In this final verdict on the Wandering Poet, the narrator presents the poet as an archetypal victim, doomed by his own 'surpassing Spirit' (*l.* 714) which entitles him to a glimpse of the sacred 'chalice' (*l.* 676), that is, the vision of the veiled maid, but which also condemns him to a quest for an unattainable goal:

Heartless things
Are done and said i' the world, and many worms
And beasts and men live on, and mighty Earth
From sea and mountain, city and wilderness,
In vesper low or joyous orison,
Lifts still its solemn voice:--but thou art
fled-- . . . (*ll.* 690-5).

The Poet is now forever excluded from the 'phantasmal scene' of nature, but he also escapes the '[h]eartless things', which initiates and now seem to justify the Poet's self-centred seclusion. The dead Poet becomes an 'image' in the universe just as the veiled maid is an 'image' of the Poet's mind. In other words, the Poet has become to the narrator exactly what the veiled maid is to the Poet. In the end, the Poet's quest for the 'bright shadow of the lovely dream' parallels the narrator's own quest for the 'dream of youth' (*ll.* 669-70). Both constitute an 'ineffable tale' (*l.* 168) which is best expressed by and preserved in the 'pale

despair and cold tranquillity' (l. 718). The final section of the poem exemplifies the narrator's provisional self-positioning between irony and sympathy, neither of which is sustained. The poem ends in a reticence which does not arrest the oscillation but only refuses to resolve the tensions between the contradictions.³³

Alastor prefigures the notion of love that Shelley expounds in the essay 'On Love', a view derived ultimately from Plato.³⁴ The Wandering Poet embodies the potentially damaging effects of the 'surpassing Spirit' which is nurtured by nature to embark on the quest for an embodiment of his ideal prototype. *Alastor* starts as an investigation into the Romantic discourse of sensibility, but finishes as an elegy for the Poet. The Preface establishes the narrator's ambiguous stance towards the wandering poet, and thus prefigures the poem itself, in which irony collapses into sympathy. The tensions between these two contradictory attitudes remain unresolved, and hence the poem can articulate only a paradox. The desire that drives the Poet and that infects the narrator, the desire to achieve communion with an ideal self, inevitably, it would seem, has the effect of alienating the individual who yields to it from any possibility of human community. The notion of an 'ideal community' becomes, in this bleak view of things, a contradiction in terms.

³³ I do not totally agree with Rajan's reading of *Alastor* as a 'sentimental' text, rather than an 'ironic' one. Rajan maintains that the irony in *Alastor* is 'not internalised within the poem, through a narrator who takes a consciously ironic attitude towards a visionary protagonist'. For Rajan, irony in *Alastor* is only 'discovered' by a 'rebellious reader' (Rajan, 'Idealism and Scepticism' p. 263, note 37). But I would like to distinguish two kinds of irony in the poem, one that the narrator is conscious of maintaining, and the other that he remains unaware of. The moments of conscious irony are designed by the narrator as signals of his critical stance towards the Wandering Poet, but he fails to see the irony inherent both in his conscious effort at keeping his critical distance and in his eventual outburst of sympathy for the poet. It is this double edgedness of irony that is to be 'discovered' by the reader.

³⁴ For Shelley's translation and exploration of Plato, see James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham, N. C.: Duke UP, 1949). Reiman notes the composition date of the essay 'On Love' as likely between 20 and 25 July, 1818, after Shelley finished his translation of 'The Banquet' and before he began 'Discourse of the Manners of the Ancient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love' (SPP, p. 473). For a full discussion of the essay's date, see Kenneth Neill Cameron and Donald H. Reiman, ed., *Shelley and His Circle: 1773-1822*, 6 Vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP 1961-73), Vol. vi, 633-47.

III. Italian Exile

Shelley suggests a way of reconciling the contradictions of *Alastor* in *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*. These two works offer models for an accomplished community. They share a general outline of events in which characters move from forced exile towards an ultimate union in retreat. In the former, Shelley attempts to rescue 'wrecked' hope by awarding Laon and Cythna niches in the Temple of the Spirit. In the latter, Shelley enshrines the repentant Prometheus and Asia in a cave which embodies their virtue. These two works, with characters moving similarly towards the transcendental realm, expose the paradox of Shelley's project of retreat, that is, the wish to reform the world is seen fully realised at the moment when the reformers secure a refuge for themselves from the contentions of the world. This is a paradox which Shelley refuses to redress in *Laon and Cythna*, but which he comes to resolve in *Prometheus Unbound*. The earlier poem represents Shelley's attitude shortly before his departure for Europe in early 1818, while the later poem constitutes his most comprehensive meditation on the poet's role in a period when reactionary forces reigned (1818-9).

Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century, as its title originally stands, contains three textual levels, the Preface, the Dedication and the poem. The Preface addresses the poem to 'enlightened and refined' readers, asking them to regard it as an 'experiment on the temper of the public mind, as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives' (Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 32). Shelley frames the poem within a series of movements from retreat to social and historical engagement and back towards retreat. In the Dedication, Shelley emerges from

his 'lone retreat' to present Mary the poem, the fruit of his retreat. If there should be no response to his cry, Shelley proclaims to Mary and to the world:

thou and I
Sweet friend! can look from our tranquillity
Like lamps into the world's tempestuous night,--
Two tranquil stars, . . .
That burn from year to year with unextinguished
light (*ll.* 121-6).

The protagonists, Laon and Cythna, embark on a similar journey. They are forced out of their childhood retreat by tyranny. The sites of their respective imprisonments, the platform where Laon is bound and the subterranean cave where Cythna is incarcerated, function as places of exile, that is, aberrant retreats which nevertheless enable them to liberate themselves. Their subsequent social involvement paves the way for their reunion, which in turn empowers them to endure the collapse of their revolutionary enterprise. Their joint surrender on the sacrificial pyre is eventually rewarded when they enter the Temple of the Spirit, where they continue to inspire revolutionaries of later generations. The trajectory from retreat to engagement and finally to retreat is thus clearly outlined as the dynamic of the poem.

This large trajectory is mirrored in miniature in the life story of the old Hermit, who nurses Laon after his incarceration. The Hermit, a once-disillusioned revolutionary, was inspired by the example of Laon, and has come out of his 'cell' to embrace again the cause of liberty. The Hermit functions as a foil to Laon. Long before Laon's time, the Hermit had become a 'lamp of splendour'. His retreat preserves himself from the 'abject' multitude (*l.* 1489). But it also bars him from an interaction with the real world. The Hermit, now impeded by his 'aged frame', remains a passive instrument of the cause that Laon actively fights for. The Hermit's re-involvement shows the

inspirational effect of Laon's endeavour. On the other hand, Laon is assisted by the Hermit to emerge from his incarceration and to resume his revolutionary endeavour. Their mutual support affirms the salutary virtue of a community of like minds.

In parallel with Laon's incarceration, Cythna experiences her imprisonment in a submarine cave. Her rape by the tyrant does not reduce her to a slave. However, she remains a 'spirit in fleshly chains' (I. 2882), with power even to shame the rapist. In her imprisonment, she gives birth to a child while suffering from a 'creeping' madness. Nevertheless, her strong spirit overpowers the tyrant by making the child entirely her own. The new-born baby embodies a possibility for her to renew infantile potentiality, for in that 'strange retreat . . . [the] two did play,-- / Both infants, weaving wings for time's perpetual way' (II. 3016-8). In fact, her baby rescues her from insanity.³⁵ After the baby is kidnapped by the tyrant's servant, Cythna falls prey to a second fit of madness until she rescues a nautilus from an eagle. This incident recalls the mariner's blessing of the water-snakes in Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. In a word, both of them need to emerge from their troubled self-absorption and to recognise the beauty and need of other creatures. Only then can the full significance of the cave be revealed to her:

what was this cave?
Its deep foundation no firm purpose knows
Immutable, resistless, strong to save,
Like mind while yet it mocks the all-devouring
grave (II. 3078-81).

She has triumphed over the tyrant and now wins another victory over her bereavement. The cave, which both affirms and denies its function as a grave, paradoxically enables her to recuperate. Furthermore, her emancipated

³⁵ In *Rosalind and Helen*, Rosalind is also saved from despondency by nursing her child. For the redemptive function of parturition, see Alan Richardson, 'Romanticism and The Colonisation of the Feminine', in Anne K. Mellor, ed. *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1988), pp. 13-25, p. 19.

imagination allows her a glimpse of historical wisdom for she conjures up earthly scenes of wars: 'thus [her] prison was the populous earth' (l. 3136) and also allows her an access to the deepest recesses of the human mind. Having achieved the liberation of her own mind, Cythna can inspire the mariners to reject their own willing enslavement. In this sense, her imprisonment prepares her for her role as an emancipatress.

The separate imprisonment of Laon and Cythna paves the way for their reunion in the battlefield and the consummation of their love in a ruinous cell. The cell shelters them from the raging war, but only temporarily. Laon asks himself when he later recalls the event:

Was it one moment that confounded thus
All thought, all sense, all feeling, into one
Unutterable power, which *shielded* us
Even from our *own cold looks* . . . (ll. 2641-4,
my emphases).

The effect of the sense of guilt, a guilt at enjoyment when the world at large suffers, is dramatised in Laon's encounter with a mad woman stricken by pestilence. The encounter takes place in the market-place of a desolate village, where Laon sees the 'corpses stare / With *horny eyes* upon each other's face' (ll. 2749-52, my emphases). These eyes recall an earlier scene in the middle of the battle:

Thus sudden, unexpected feast was spread
For the carrion-fowls of Heaven.--*I saw* the
sight--
*I moved--I lived--*as o'er the heaps of dead,
Whose *stony eyes* glared in the morning light
I trod; --to me there came no thought of flight
But with loud cries of scorn which whoso heard
That dreaded death, felt in his veins the might
Of virtuous shame return, the crowd *I stirred*,
And desperation's hope in many hearts recurred
(ll. 2398-2406, my emphases).

The comparison of the dead in battle to a 'feast' parallels the 'feast' that the mad woman spreads in front of a ring of dead babies. The parallel sharpens Laon's

sense of guilt. In narrating his experience, he accentuates the process of his dawning conscience. His quasi-heroic stature, which is presented in 'the crowd I stirred', is seriously undermined. The glaring 'stony eyes' force him painfully to realise that he had 'stirred' up the crowd. The nightmarish glare also recalls Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Just as the remorse of the ancient mariner is intensified by his being the sole survivor on the ship, Laon, it is suggested, suffers guilt that he remains alive. Moreover, the mad woman, who 'glued' her burning lips to Laon's (l. 2763), perverts the consummation of Laon and Cythna's love, and wrenches them away from the sequestered cell in order to expiate their guilt for the blood that has been shed.

It is in the light of expiation that we must view Laon and Cythna's martyrdom on the pyre. Their death ironically fulfils the tyrant's wish. On the one hand, it represents their acceptance of responsibility for instigating the revolt. They are impelled by a moral imperative to stop innocent people from sacrificing themselves on their behalf. On the other hand, the tragic waste reflects Shelley's sense of himself at the time of composition. He regarded the poem as 'the communications of a dying man'.³⁶ Compelled by a sense of his own imminent death, Shelley enshrines himself, together with his hero and heroine, in the Temple of the Spirit. As a result, the poem and the Temple function as a compensation for the frustrations which Shelley and his protagonists will inevitably meet. Ideals are preserved, but only by isolating them within a protected refuge. Hence the Temple of the Spirit is located in the middle of a tranquil lake surrounded by 'snow-bright mountains' (l. 4811). The lake offers a safe 'haven' for Laon and Cythna, and it exerts a perennial appeal for those who hold ideals, rather like the twin stars in the Dedication that burn 'from year to year with unextinguished light' (l. 126).

³⁶ From Shelley's letter to Godwin (11 Dec. 1817), included in Mary's note to the poem. See Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 157.

The Temple of the Spirit as a reward for the martyred Laon and Cythna problematises the nature of Shelley's project. As Donna Richardson notes, the poem presents 'a blueprint for the achievement of individual excellence which manifests itself politically in futile self-sacrifice'.³⁷ I would argue that the incongruity between political failure and personal success can be dissolved as we realise that the validity of the Temple only lies in its relation to previous events. None of these events can have meaning independent of the whole sequence. The enshrinement in the Temple ought not to be deemed a 'personal success' of Laon and Cythna, but only as a secondary achievement in compensation for their political failure, just as Shelley aspires to the stars only if there is 'no response to [his] cry'. Nevertheless, the Temple does suggest a flight to the transcendental realm, which seems to defeat the conviction spelt out in the Preface that we will ultimately see 'the temporary triumph of oppression . . . the transient nature of ignorance and error, and the eternity of genius and virtue'. The gesture of securing hope in the transcendental realm seems to imply insurmountable despair in the world of actuality. The Temple of the Spirit does question Shelley's optimism in the Preface that 'resolute perseverance and indefatigable hope' will bring about eventually the amelioration of mankind, but its geographic site, surrounded by 'snow-bright mountains' in an echo of the mountain stronghold of the Assassins, effectively suggests that revolutionary ideals can only be preserved by the exercise of active virtue. In comparison with *Alastor*, which only contains conflicting drives without fully recognising them, *Laon and Cythna* recognises these tensions but still cannot resolve them in a tenable manner.

Laon and Cythna registers Shelley's last attempt to publish his work in England before departing for Italy. The poem functions as a review of his earlier experience, both political and personal. The detachment from direct

³⁷ Donna Richardson, "'The Dark Idolatry of Self': The Dialectic of Imagination in Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 40 (1991), 73-98, p. 74.

political engagement, presented in the poem as the final position of the protagonists, grew out of his Irish expedition. The scandal related to the suicide of his first wife forced him to realise that his poetic career hinged on changing his public image as a libertine and atheist rebel. The poem thus offers a double perspective: looking back on his past endeavours and looking ahead to the cultivation of a community of his own. His anxiety to reach an audience reveals itself both in the popular poetic style adopted from Robert Southey and in his submission, though reluctant, to the publisher Charles Ollier, who urged Shelley to suppress references to incest and atheism.³⁸ The amiable community at Marlow seemed for a time to offer a possibility of realising his project. But the poem's failure to obtain a sympathetic audience could only have prompted a recognition that such a community functioned only to idealise Shelley's exclusion from the mainstream of English life.

During his Italian sojourn, Shelley was preoccupied with a poignant sense of exile. He more than once referred to Italy as 'the paradise of Exiles', in *Julian and Maddalo*, and later in an invitation to Thomas Medwin (17 January 1820, see Jones, ii, 170). Amidst Italian ruins and landscape, Shelley resumed the psychological investigation of the discourse of sensibility in the fragment of 'Prince Athanase'. But in contrast to *Alastor*, this time the investigation has a wider social dimension.³⁹

Like the Wandering Poet in *Alastor*, Prince Athanase is struck with some grief which remains unknown even to himself and which must remain untold. He becomes a 'hopeless wanderer, through Mankind' (l. 20).⁴⁰ Similarly, it is a

³⁸ According to Holmes, the alterations that Ollier suggested mainly concerned references to Christianity and Republicanism, but only minor alterations about the brother-and-sister relationship between Laon and Cythna. See Holmes, pp. 391-2, and Reiman, ed., *Shelley and His Circle*, V, 141-67.

³⁹ Mary notes that Shelley intended to model this fragment on *Alastor* and to explore the nature of two kinds of love, one ideal (Uranian), the other earthly (Pandemonian). Shelley's own note to the fragment indicates that he refrained from further investigating into the depth of Prince Athanase's mind, because it struck him that 'in an attempt at extreme refinement and analysis, his conceptions might be betrayed into the assuming a morbid character' (Matthews, *Shelley*, pp. 158, 161).

⁴⁰ The text of the fragment is drawn from Matthews, *Shelley*, pp. 156-64. I have also

longing for a 'mirror' of his own mind that drives him onwards (l. 76). This mirror also represents the 'lair of rest' (l. 106) to which he wishes to retire. His sense of exhaustion results not only from frustrated love but more importantly from an unremitting 'toil' for the good of his kind (ll. 26-8). Shelley in one of the fragments expresses a note of stark despair:

the Spirit weeps within
Tears bitterer than the blood of agony
Trembling in drops on the discoloured skin
Of those who love their kind and therefore
perish
In ghastly torture-- . . . (ll. 304-8, Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 166).

This lurid picture suggests the influence of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Manfred*, and their 'relish in gloom'. The relationship between Athanase and the aged Zonoras recalls the interdependence between Laon and the old Hermit in *Laon and Cythna*. Zonoras spent his youth in an 'olive bower at OEnoe':

Like one who finds
A fertile island in the barren sea,
One mariner who has survived his mates
Many a drear month in a great ship--so he

With soul-sustaining songs, and sweet debates
Of ancient lore, there fed his lonely being:--
'The mind becomes that which it contemplates, .
...'
(ll. 132-9, Matthews, *Shelley*, pp. 159-60)

Thus strengthened, Zonoras emerges from retreat to accept his sacred obligation, nursing the infant Prince Athanase after his parents died in battle.

consulted Kelvin Everest, ed., 'Athanase', *Keats-Shelley Review*, 7 (Fall 1992), 62-84. I agree with Everest in his refutation of Reiman, who believed the fragment was composed in the second half of 1819, contemporaneously with *Julian and Maddalo*. On grounds of the similarity of themes (most obviously the relationship between the Prince and Zonoras) and the poetic style (*terza rima*), the fragment, argues Everest, begun in late 1817 and continued sporadically over the first few months in Italy, set aside unfinished, and finally round-off as a 'Fragment' for inclusion in the proposed *Julian and Maddalo* volume in 1819 (Everest, 'Athanase', p. 64). See Shelley's letter to Ollicier (13 December, 1819), Jones, ii, 196. See also *Shelley and His Circle*, VI, pp. 1100-4.

The picture of the 'olive bower', which is compared to a 'fertile island in the barren sea', sharply contrasts with the 'lonely tower' of the Prince. Shelley thus envisages two kinds of retreat, one fertile, the other barren. A new insight into the psychological dimension of social obligations might result from a negotiation between Prince Athanase's and Zonoras's attitudes. But the fragmentary status of this work leaves their differences unresolved. The tension between these two attitudes, which has been subordinated to the paramount political theme in *Laon and Cythna*, remains a disturbing subtext in Shelley's later works.

The paradoxical nature of Shelley's design for an ideal community fully manifests itself in *Prometheus Unbound*. The lyrical drama has a general outline that recalls *Laon and Cythna*, a movement from forced exile to an ultimate retreat. But *Prometheus Unbound* advances on the earlier work in that the paradox is contained and reconciled within the dialectical structure of the poem.

There are three focal points of exile / retreat in *Prometheus Unbound*: the Caucasus mountain top, Asia's Indian vale, and Prometheus's cave. The Caucasus mountain top where Prometheus is enchained represents an externalisation of his mental state. On the one hand, nature serves as an accomplice of Jupiter in the punishment of Prometheus, as the 'crawling glaciers' pierce the Titan and the earthquake wrenches 'the rivets' from his 'quivering wounds'. On the other, the unresponsiveness of nature reflects Prometheus's stagnant mind as he is bound in an antagonism with Jupiter, in which his 'own misery' corresponds with Jupiter's 'vain revenge' (I, 11). Only after he realises the barrenness of hatred and revokes his curse on Jupiter is he allowed a vision of Asia. He finally understands: 'all hope was vain but love' (I, 824). It is this realisation that enables Panthea, as a proxy of Prometheus, to awaken Asia from her 'sad exile' in an Indian vale, in order to undertake the enterprise left unfinished by the bound Prometheus.

Asia's vale functions in opposition to Prometheus's mountain top enslavement. The Indian vale, once rugged and barren as the mountain top, has been transformed by her presence. Nevertheless, the maintenance of its fecundity depends on the reunion of Asia and Prometheus. It is from this verdant vale that Asia sets out to search for the ultimate truth concerning the release and triumph of Prometheus. After obtaining the knowledge in her encounter with Demogorgon, she is exhorted by spirits to embark on a journey on a boat through the different ages of man. Asia sings:

We have past Age's icy caves,
And Manhood's dark and tossing waves
And Youth's smooth ocean, smiling to
betray:
Beyond the glassy gulfs we flee
Of shadow-peopled Infancy,
Through Death and Birth, to a diviner day,
A paradise of vaulted bowers
Lit by downward-gazing flowers
And watery paths that wind between
Wildernesses calm and green,
Peopled by shapes too bright to see, . . .
(II, v, 97-108).

This journey illuminates, as it were, both what the Indian vale represents in the past and what Prometheus's cave stands for in the future. It is a journey backward to Infancy, which represents potentiality. As Harold Bloom notes, Asia travels backwards in order to 'replenish' her potentiality so that she is able to arrive on the 'diviner day' at the paradise where she will be reunited with Prometheus.⁴¹ This journey underscores the psychological truth of the transitory status of the Indian vale.

⁴¹ Bloom defends the apparently regressive nature of Asia's journey by pointing out the archetypal value of such a journey, in which Asia is regarded as 're-entering the Gardens of Adonis momentarily and out of cycle to replenish what is vital in her in the seedbed of life'. See Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1959), p. 127. For other defences of the 'regressive' nature of the retreat, see Holmes, p. 507; Stuart M. Sperry, *Shelley's Major Verse: the Narrative and Dramatic Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1988), pp. 106, 113-4; Timothy Webb, *Shelley: A Voice Not Understood* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977), p.143; Dawson, pp. 100-2.

However, the lyrical drama culminates in another retreat, Prometheus's cave, which apparently recalls the verdant Indian vale. The cave is inscribed with geological implications which, as Earl Wasserman argues, illustrate Shelley's philosophical system of the One Mind, and with mythological implications which, as Stuart Curran argues, exemplify Shelley's syncretic approach to mythology.⁴² These inscriptions attest to the centrality of the cave in the drama. The cave preserves an archetypal virtue which renders it exemplary and permanent in human history. As Prometheus envisages:

the progeny immortal
Of Painting, Sculpture, and rapt Poesy
And arts, though unimagined, yet to be.
The wandering voices and the shadows these
Of all that man becomes, the mediators
Of that best worship, love, by him and us
Given and returned, swift shapes and sounds
which grow
More fair and soft as man grows wise and kind,
And veil by veil evil and error fall . . .
Such virtue has the cave and place around
(III, iii, 54-63).

However, in the cave of potentiality and purification, Prometheus, Asia and her sisters lead a tranquil life that smacks of something other than triumphant celebration. Prometheus anticipates the future they will share:

There is a cave, . . .
A simple dwelling, which shall be our own,
Where we will sit and talk of time and change

⁴² Wasserman sees Shelley's deployment of volcanic imagery as evidence that Prometheus's cave (III, iii, 10-63), the cave of the Earth (III, iii, 124-47), and the crater of Demorgorgon's realm (II, iii, 3-7) refer to the same place. The 'restoration' (III, iii, 147) of the Titan by virtue of the healing spring, whose poison is now eliminated, prefigures the 'restoration' of the 'leprous child' (IV, 393). The cave demonstrates, as Wasserman argues, that Shelley's cosmology of an autonomous universe coincides with his ethical hypotheses. See Wasserman, pp. 280-332. The location of the cave, Colonus, as Neil Fraistat notes, being also the birth place of the Furies, implies that good and evil could derive from the same source and that the human mind is capable of both. Neil Fraistat, *The Poem and the Book* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina P, 1985), p. 162. Stuart Curran points out that Prometheus and Asia's journey to their cave (III, iii, 152-75), and Asia's descent to Demorgorgon's realm, resemble the route taken by Dionysus. The allusion to Dionysus suggests that the creative imagination is the core of healing and regeneration. Curran, *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis* (San Marino: Hutchinson Library, 1975), p. 91.

As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves
unchanged--
What can hide man from Mutability? (III, iii,
10, 22-5).

The new Promethean world thus has at its centre a place of retirement from toils and of detachment from humankind. This picture begs two questions. First, the allusion to King Lear's resigned anticipation of his future with Cordelia renders Prometheus's vision a simple submission to his fate. As Lear says to Cordilia:

Come, let's away to prison.
We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage; . . .
. . . so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too--
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out--
And take upon's the mystery of things
As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out
In a wall'd prison packs and seats of great ones
That ebb and flow by th' moon
(*King Lear*, V, iii, 7-19)⁴³

Prometheus envisages his future bliss with Asia in a tone, similar to Lear's, the resigned quality of which recalls his earlier sigh after the departure of the Spirits:

I would fain
Be what it is my destiny to be,
The saviour and the strength of suffering man,
Or sink into the original gulph of things. . .
There is no agony, and no solace left;
Earth can console, Heaven can torment no more
(I, 815-20).

The passage expresses an acquiescence in a life free from agony whereas the vision of future bliss in the cave expresses a satisfaction at a life free from strife. In the former peace is won because suffering has reached its limit; in the latter peace results because suffering has been removed from the world. The

⁴³ Quotations from *King Lear* are drawn from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed., Peter Alexander (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1951).

tone of acquiescence and of satisfaction recalls the longing of Prince Athanase for 'a lair of rest' from his toils for mankind. This prompts the second question: Prometheus's apparent complacency in detachment from humankind jeopardises his original role as man's champion. The immortality of the Titan makes the cave, in William Ulmer's view, a 'privileged interiority', which is at the core of Shelley's 'visionary humanism' (Ulmer, p. 79). It is this fundamental mistrust of the multitude that shapes the lyrical drama into a play written for the select few.⁴⁴ However, the accusation that the play's concern for humanity is disingenuous fails to register that Prometheus's cave acquires its transcendental value only by offering itself as an example to humankind. The immortal Titans are above human beings, but not aloof from their concerns. Shelley presents Prometheus's cave as a dialectical model which serves as a matrix for our investigation of his treatment of the theme of retreat.

The cave illustrates Shelley's complete understanding of the paradox of retreat. It is located at the core of the earth, yet it is as detached from the earth as the 'loftiest star' in the 'intense inane'. It thus becomes at once the centre and the circumference of the human world. It differs from the vantage point where the Fairy Queen leads Ianthé to view the universe from a 'just perspective' (*Queen Mab*, II, 250) in that it offers a perspective that does not free the observer from involvement with the humanity that he contemplates. The cave also differs from the Temple of the Spirit in *Laon and Cythna* in that it not only restores the immortal status of the Titans but explicitly spells out the 'Titans' role as supreme examples to humanity. The central status of the cave establishes the human mind as the spring of action, while its detached marginality marks it as the unattainable goal of human progress.

Prometheus Unbound is not a simple celebration of the triumph of the One Mind as Earl Wasserman argues. On the contrary, it reflects the accumulated

⁴⁴ In a letter to John Gisborne (26 January, 1822), Shelley claimed that *Prometheus Unbound* was intended for no more than five or six persons. See Jones, ii, 388.

frustration and indignation of Shelley's Italian exile. By staging a revolution entirely of the mind,⁴⁵ Shelley reveals a keen awareness that his design for an ideal community in retreat remains entirely imaginative and forever unattainable in actuality.

After composing *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley examines the unattainability of an ideal community in different modes. *Epipsychidion* explores the theme within a psychological-linguistic dimension. The verse epistle to Maria Gisborne (1 July, 1820) imagines a reunion of friends, but always subordinates anticipated joy to nostalgia for what is lost. The poems to Jane Williams express and lament, in a lyrical mood, the transitory nature of a union with one's beloved. These explorations offer various clues to our understanding of the emotional undertows that contribute to the paradoxical configuration of the poet in *A Defence of Poetry*.

Epipsychidion offers an examination of the tendency in Shelley's poetry for the ideal communities that he delights in imagining to be transformed into retreats, sites that allow the chosen few a privileged refuge from the world. Shelley depends on Dante's decidedly esoteric collection of poems to Beatrice, the 'Vita Nuova', poems written only for poets, as a precursor par excellence. *Epipsychidion* enacts the unending movement towards an unattainable goal of perfection, which at once implies a progressive view of history and expresses a dismay at the unattainability of the ideal. These two moods are reflected in the very constitution of the place of retreat and the structure of the poem itself.⁴⁶

The isle 'under Ionian skies', the place to which the poet invites Emily, achieves its status as a retreat by its exclusion of politics and by its erasure of

⁴⁵ Patrick Bizarro, 'The Symbol of the Androgyne in Blake's *The Four Zoas* and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*', in Joanna Stephens Mink and Janet Doubler Ward, ed., *Joinings and Disjoinings: The Significance of Marital Status in Literature* (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1911), pp. 35-51.

⁴⁶ This section is a revised version of my paper, "'Epipsychidion': '[A]n isle under Ionian skies'", delivered in the international conference on *Romantic Geographies*, held by the Centre of European Romanticism, University of Glasgow (September, 1994). The essay is included in the forthcoming publication of the conference proceedings.

history. The first principle manifests itself in the locality of the isle; the second is embodied in the ruined pleasure-house. The isle summarises the characteristics of other places of Shelleyan retreat. All the virtues of retreat are secured by its Greek location. However, the Greek locality serves as nothing more than a point of departure. The poet starts his invitation to Emily by announcing, 'This isle and house are *mine*' (l. 513). In other words, the 'scheme of life', an ideal community limited to the select few, is firmly based on the social rank and material wealth of the settlers. This evidently contradicts Shelley's political commitment to equality, yet corresponds to his recurrent ambition both in literary works and in real life to establish a community of kindred spirits. In this sense, the lone-dwelling on the Greek isle constitutes both the lovers' paradise and fortress. The poet acquires the isle only to rescue this 'wreck of Paradise' (l. 423) from the ravages of time and from intrusion by undesirable people.

Such an exclusion presents itself as the precondition for the lovers' enjoyment of each other. But their secluded life betrays a note of weariness, as the poet envisages: 'we two will rise, and sit, and walk together, / Under the roof of blue Ionian weather' (ll. 541-2). This idyllic picture resembles the life that Prometheus and Asia will lead in their cave but eliminates even the muted concern that the Titans continue to feel for humankind. This allusion renders the isle merely a regressive centre of retreat, smacking of a Lear-like acquiescence in defeat.

Furthermore, the complete union that the lovers will enjoy on the isle actually complements the 'wrecked' status of this paradise. In the poet's vision of bliss, opposite terms are paired, so that each destroys the other, in order to construct the unconstricted space that is the condition of liberated joy: 'one life, one death, / One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality, / And one annihilation' (ll. 585-7). This picture of erotic union differs from Shelley's earlier treatments of similar subjects. In *Laon and Cythna*, a guilt at secluded enjoyment at a time

of war intrudes on the scene of consummation (VI, xxxv). In *Prometheus Unbound*, erotic love occupies a pivotal role in a universal regeneration and is thus liberated from guilt. But in *Epipsychidion*, erotic union is envisaged solely in itself and for itself, devoid of the wider context offered in the earlier works. Deprived of any buttress, moral or political, erotic union is at once the centre and circumference of the poem, which finds its embodiment in the Ionian isle. As a consequence, the isle achieves the status of an 'antitype', which is defined in the earlier essay, 'On Love', as 'a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap' (*SPP*, p. 474). The isle, as a complete universe in itself, does not represent a paradise, but a 'wreck of Paradise', just as the poem remains a fragment of a longer work. The poet does not seek to regain the paradise, but simply contents himself with the fragment of a once complete civilisation.

The ruined pleasure-house embodies the second principle of the lovers' paradise.

in the heart
Of Earth having assumed its form, then grown
Out of the mountains, from the living stone,
Lifting itself in caverns light and high:
For all the antique and learned imagery
Has been erased, and in the place of it
The ivy and the wild-vine interknit
The volumes of their many-twining stems; . . .
(II, 493-501).

The replacement of culture by nature suggests more than a 'cyclical recurrence' of history, as William Ulmer argues (Ulmer, p. 145), for the imagery illustrates a process of progressive replacement.⁴⁷ Human artefacts are replaced by natural objects, both of which are recorded in language.

⁴⁷ The reading of the ruined pleasure-house is indebted to, yet differs from, William Ulmer's. Ulmer, adopting the view of J. Hillis Miller, regards the house as a 'visionary trope of ahistorical rapture', which is inscribed at its inception with the 'rhythm of historical change', and these inscriptions suggest in Shelley's contemporary context an attempt to recover a 'lost democratic past'. See Ulmer, pp. 143-7, and J. Hillis Miller, 'The Critic as Host', *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed., Harold Bloom, et al. (New York, Continuum, 1979), pp. 239-47. I agree with Miller that the house embodies the dynamic of the poem,

The process of replacement mirrors the movement of language which attempts to apprehend and describe the beauty of Emily.

Sweet Lamp! my moth-like Muse has burned its
wings;
Or, like a dying swan who soars and sings, . . .
All that thou art. Art thou not void of guile,
. . .
A well of sealed and secret happiness, . . .
. . . A Star
Which moves not in the moving Heavens, alone?
A Smile amid dark frowns? a gentle tone
Amid rude voices? a beloved light?
A Solitude, a Refuge, a Delight? . . .
. . . I measure
The world of fancies, seeking one like thee,
And find--alas! mine own infirmity (ll. 53-71).

This frenzied succession of metaphors results in a temporary collapse of imagination. It expresses a mixture of surprise at the infinite beauty of Emily and dismay at the inefficacy of language. The extravagant array of metaphors betrays Shelley's awareness of the futility of attempting to express the unapprehendable. This passage enacts a process of dwindling and kindling,⁴⁸ which culminates in the exclamation upon the departure of the vision of bliss.

Woe is me!
The winged words on which my soul would pierce
Into the height of Love's rare Universe,
Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.--
I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!
(ll. 587-92).

This collapse suggests a surrender to the supreme beauty of Emily and of poetry. The dissolution is explained in *A Defence of Poetry*: 'Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it' (SPP, p. 491). As soon as the vision of bliss is envisaged (unsheathed) through language, it consumes not only the linguistic medium that carries it but

that is, substitution and displacement. I also agree with Ulmer that the house is a paradoxical emblem of the poem. However, I find the house representing an attempt not to recover a democratic past but to establish a privileged refuge and fortress for the lovers.

⁴⁸ The image of 'kindling and dwindling' is drawn from Daniel Hughes, 'Kindling and Dwindling: the Poetic Process in Shelley', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 13 (1964), 13-28.

also the poet who expresses it. But the envoi ensures that the dissolution paves the way to a new beginning, in which another community is envisaged:

Then haste
Over the hearts of men, until ye [weak verses]
meet
Marina, Vanna, Primus, and the rest,
And bid them love each other and be blessed:
And leave the troop which errs, and which
reproves,
And come and be my guest,--for I am Love's
(ll. 599-604).

The sequence of dwindling and kindling recalls the transforming power of imagination in 'The Cloud': 'I change but I cannot die . . . Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb, / I arise and unbuild it again' ('The Cloud', ll. 76, 83-4). But the resemblance is deceptive in that *Epipsychidion* presents more than a celebration of the liberating power of the imagination. The core of the issue in *Epipsychidion* lies in the inefficacy of language.

The series of metaphors reveals a view of language that constitutes the dynamic of the poem. The meaning of one metaphor is never fully present in itself but is only acquired in the process of being replaced by the next metaphor, so that poetry can record nothing but vestiges of meaning. The movement of language thus turns the replacement of culture by nature into an endless displacement.⁴⁹ The inefficacy of language, in *A Defence of Poetry*, is represented as the safeguard of the sublime beauty of poetry:

All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed (*SPP*, p. 500).

⁴⁹ This view of language comes close to Derrida's notion of 'trace'. In Derrida's interview with Julia Kristeva, Derrida maintains: 'no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each 'element' . . . being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the *text* produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, . . . is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.' See Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans., Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1981), p. 26.

This continuously 'unveiling' power of language enables the poet to function as a herald of Liberty.⁵⁰ Instead of a straightforward 'unveiling', the inadequacy of language fulfils a double function in *Epipsychidion*. On the one hand, it prompts and sustains the quest for an ultimate vehicle for Emily. On the other, it protects the most private meaning of the poem from disclosure. In the passage describing the triple influence over him, the Moon-Comet-and-Tempest, the poet exclaims: 'These words conceal:--if not, each word would be / The key of staunchless tears. . .' (ll. 318-20). This constant oscillation between concealment and confession is maintained by the 'vitally metaphorical' language (*SPP*, p. 490).

This dynamic of the poem, manifested in the dwindling and kindling of the imagination, and in the tension between confession and concealment, is consolidated in the circular structure of the poem. First of all, the story of the young poet in the Advertisement mirrors in miniature the movement of the poem proper. The poet's scheme of retreat is foiled by his untimely death, just as the vision of bliss withdraws due to the inefficacy of language. Both are in a sense prevented from actualisation. In other words, both are protected from reaching a closure. Second, in the poem proper the poet's amorous history presents a blueprint for the future, but the future acts most forcefully to recall the past. Third, the envoi summoning into existence yet another community of like-minds recalls the epigraph quoted from Dante, 'My Song, I fear that thou wilt find but few / Who fitly shall conceive thy reasoning'. The triply circular structure of the poem thus keeps the vision of an ideal community forever in sight but forever unattainable.

⁵⁰ The most prominent spokesman of this view is Jerrold E. Hogle. Hogle seeks to present a radically different interpretation of Shelley's poetry under the principle of transference, which he maintains not only underscores the speedily shifting style of Shelley's verse but constitutes the very essence of his moral vision, for it ensures our freedom to change in an increasingly ossifying society and it brings forth a truly relational thinking that will lead to a non-violent equalisation. Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (New York and London: Oxford UP, 1988), p. 27.

The unattainability of the ideal community renders the quest at once a pursuit and flight, in the same way as the goal of the quest, Emily, the ultimate vehicle and the 'true meaning' of the poem's rhetorical figures, is at once '[a]n image of some bright Eternity' and '[a] shadow of some golden dream' (ll. 115-6). By means of the young poet's quest, Shelley explores the psychological dimension of Plato's doctrine of love. Shelley translated Plato's 'The Banquet' in July 1818. He was well aware of the dilemma of Plato's idea of Love, who, according to the foreign prophetess, Diotima, is the child of Plenty and Poverty. Diotima defines Love as 'collectively the desire in men that good should be for ever present to them' and as 'the desire in the beautiful, both with relation to the body and the soul' (Notopoulos, p. 445). In the essay 'On Love', Shelley upholds the pursuit of an antitype as a motivating force in life. The unattainability of the antitype ensures the continued vitality of our soul, for '[s]o soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself' (SPP, p. 474). As a result, Love's rare universe in *Epipsychidion* has to remain 'unascended', like the loftiest star in the 'intense inane' in the third act of *Prometheus Unbound*.⁵¹ But this unattainability of the ideal also cruelly constitutes the predicament of the poet.

However, Shelley remains uneasily aware of his own predicament in the pursuit of 'true meaning' and ideal love. As readers, we cannot help wondering: in the decline from a heroic ascent to 'Passion's golden purity' towards an acquiescence in defeat and a complacent insistence on the possibility of renewal, where are we left? We are encouraged, like the mourner in *Adonais*, to respond to the beacon of the Eternal soul, and at the same time we are abandoned on the cold hill side like the wandering poet in *Alastor*. With the

⁵¹ Shelley's theory of love and language begins with something like Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance* but ends in a vision similar to Maurice Blanchot's idea of 'l'absence', which locates meaning somewhere beyond the internal differences of the signifying system. For Maurice Blanchot's theory of language and its differences from Jacques Derrida's, see Ann Smock, *The Space of Literature* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P., 1982).

defensive preface and envoi framing an evasive vision of bliss, Shelley recognises his failure to resolve these tensions, yet does so reluctantly.

Dante's own distinction between the 'Vita Nuova' as lyrical expression of personal feelings and *The Commedia* as epic endeavour charged with graver historical responsibility offers Shelley an example of a bifurcated poetic vocation which may comprehend apparently conflicting concerns. However, Shelley is too anxious to reach a possible resolution between these two. Resting at either side of the two poles can only bring temporary reprieve, which shortly thrusts him to the other pole. As a consequence, the structure and metaphors of *Epipsychidion* are both characterised by an unceasingly onward movement which is propelled by an oscillating dynamism between concealment and disclosure. The dynamism projects the ideal love and the ultimate signifier (and signified alike) forever into the future, in order to represent both as goals forever unattainable. The dynamism ensures the possibility of renewal and the prospect of liberty but it does at a high emotional price. The poetry recording such a doomed enterprise is, as Shelley explains in *A Defence of Poetry*, already a 'feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet' (*SPP*, p. 504). The poem thus embodies its title, 'on the subject of the little soul' or the 'externalised little soul' (*SPP*, p. 372, the editor's note). What Emily and the isle offer the poet is exactly what poetry offers Shelley. The ambition is to achieve a complete identity with Emily (and the isle) through erotic union and poetic practice. However the nature of writing as an externalisation of inner desire dictates the distance between the conceiving subject and the conceived object and makes the poem at once a celebration of and an elegy for Emily.

Shelley's *Letter to Maria Gisborne* (1 July 1820) presents a picture of an ideal community unstably positioned between fantasy and reality. The letter is always aware that the ideal that it proposes is incapable of realisation. Shelley draws on epistolary conventions to construct his picture of retreat, but the

conventions work to expose the dream that the poem entertains as itself an artifice.

The letter provides three versions of retreat: one in the past, another in the present, and a third in the future. Each version is constructed from a series of contrasts between the quotidian life and the ideal, between London and Italy, between past conviviality and present despondency. These contrasts intensify the desire for reunion but at the same time betray the precariousness of the community that they seek to reinstate.

Shelley recollects his time with the Gisbornes two years before at Leghorn:

 how we spun
A shroud of talk to hide us from the Sun
Of this familiar life, which seems to be
But is not:--or is but quaint mockery
Of all we would believe, and sadly blame
The jarring and inexplicable frame
Of this wrong world:--and then anatomise
The purposes and thoughts of men whose eyes
Were closed in distant years--or widely guess
The issue of the earth's great business,
When we shall be as we no longer are--
Like babbling gossips safe, who hear the war
Of winds, and sigh, but tremble not-- (ll. 154
-166).

The constant shift of tenses foregrounds a process in which retrospection and anticipation are perplexed one with the other. Their conversation spins a 'shroud' which protects them from the sun of 'familiar life', which, 'seems to be / But is not'. The actuality of life is reduced to a 'mockery' of all we 'would' believe, so that consolation is only to be found in ignoring it in favour of 'what is'. There is an inescapable irony in the way that Shelley defines his reality in opposition to his circumstances, that comes close to confessing the increasing strains in the Shelleyan household, in 'this *familiar* life', which he represents as a 'grave / Of dead despondence' (ll. 293-4, my emphasis). The contrast between the friendly circle that he had enjoyed and his everyday life at present is extended to a more inclusive contrast between now and the future: 'when we

shall be as we no longer are'. The allusions to wars and a life secluded from them suggest that Shelley has come wryly to admit his own complicity in a guilt that he had once complacently attributed to the Lake Poets, a weak desire to retreat from the 'issue of the earth's great business'. The whole poem is imbued with a nostalgia that is self-conscious enough to suggest that it is not armed against self-criticism.

The final tableau in which Shelley imagines a reunion of all his close friends reveals similar tensions between desire and disapproval. 'Oh! that Hunt, Hogg, Peacock, and Smith *were there*. . . / *We will* have books . . .' (ll. 296-8, my emphases). The confused tenses and moods betray an awareness that planning for the future has become inseparable from wishful thinking. The life that he imagines leading with his friends has its roots not in Italy but in literature:

we'll have tea and toast; . . .
Feasting on which we will philosophise! . . .
And then we'll talk--what shall we talk about?
Oh! there are themes enough for many a bout
Of thought-entangled descant; . . .
We'll make our friendly philosophic revel
Outlast the leafless time--till buds and
flowers
Warn the obscure inevitable hours
Sweet meeting by sad parting to renew--
'To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new'
(ll. 303-323).

The homely setting offers a vegetarian version of a menu consistently invoked in epistolary poems such as Ben Jonson's 'Inviting a Friend to Supper', a menu which is defined by its difference from the extravagant artificiality of formal dinners, and which frames a conversation which is free in a manner that the poems confess has become impossible in formal society. The friends will enjoy something like the fire-side discussions that William Godwin vigorously advocated. But philosophy and literature no longer serve as heralds of revolution, but merely as buffers against a leafless winter. 'We will

philosophise', Shelley writes, a phrase that inevitably recalls Coleridge and Southey's Pantisocratic schemes, and thus as inevitably their failure. This awareness of failure is aggravated by the allusion to Milton's 'Lycidas'. The staunch optimism underwritten by the seasonal cycle, which is at the core of Milton's elegy, eludes Shelley.

The triple temporal structure of the 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' invites a comparison with two lyrical poems to Jane Williams, 'The Invitation' and 'The Recollection'. In their draft versions, these two poems are considered as one poem under the title, 'The Pine Forest of the Cascine Near Pisa'. The draft version first anticipates the lovers' union, then regrets its loss, and ends in a recollection which is interrupted when the poet remembers his present situation. The division of the draft into two poems renders its temporal sequence less obvious. But it preserves an aesthetic space for the poet to reflect on the transience of life.⁵²

The moment of bliss in the divided poems is flanked by a wish and a memory, while the moment itself remains untold. 'To Jane: the Invitation' ends on a note of *carpe diem*: 'Radiant Sister of the Day, / Awake! arise, and come away!' (ll. 47-8). The poet invites Jane to participate in a joy that 'hope' had prevented him from entertaining: 'Hope, in pity mock not Woe / With smiles, . . . Long having lived on the sweet food, / At length I find one moment's good / After long pain . . .' (ll. 41-5). This note of *carpe diem* is suspended in the empty space left between this poem and 'To Jane: the Recollection'. The latter ends with a tableau which dissolves the whole recollection: '[u]ntil an envious wind crept by, / Like an unwelcome thought / Which from the mind's too faithful eye / Blots one dear image out' (ll. 81-84). The 'envious wind' which comes 'like an unwelcome thought' suggests that the unwelcome intruder is Shelley's wife, or rather the thought that he is bound to her, which reveals an

⁵² My reading of the poems to Jane Williams is indebted to William Keach, *Shelley's Style* (London: Methuen, 1984), especially, p. 208.

irony in the thought that Jane's dear image is blotted from the poet's 'too faithful eye'.

The two poems are connected by the image of the pools. The first poem moves from the pools, 'where winter rains / Image all their roof of leaves' (ll. 50-1) towards the beach, where 'the earth and ocean meet, / And all things seem only one / In the universal Sun' (ll. 67-9). The second poem moves from a 'magic circle' traced from the 'remotest seat / Of the white mountain waste, / To the soft flower beneath our feet' (ll. 41-43) towards the pools, each of which 'seemed as 'twere a little sky / Gulpfed in a world below' (ll. 54-6). The movements in opposite directions accord with the poems' proleptic (and therefore expanding) and retrospective (and therefore contracting) temporal structures. Both centre on the pools as images of consciousness. The pools present landscape in miniature. They preserve, as it were, a space 'more boundless than the depth of night, and purer than the day' ('The Recollection', ll. 59-60). They also embody the purifying effects of the 'magic circle', which emanates from and is 'interfused' with Jane's spirit. However, the blotting out of the images in the pools exposes the precarious nature of such a visionary union.

These two poems to Jane Williams, in a lyrical mode, express the intensity of such a union. His ideal of a community of like-minds, which is manifested in the Temple of the Spirit in *Laon and Cythna*, in Prometheus's cave in *Prometheus Unbound*, and in the philosophising coterie in the 'Letter to Maria Gisborne', in the poems to Jane is all but blotted out. The lyrical mode of the poems to Jane in a sense dictates the shrinking of focus onto the 'magic circle' which permits entrance only to the lovers. Nevertheless, this process of gradual contraction dramatically reveals that the ideal community that Shelley delighted in imagining throughout his career has both shrunk and come to seem increasingly inaccessible.

The lyrical modes of lament and nostalgia, as the keynote in 'Epipsychidion', the 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' and in the poems to Jane, are counterpoised by the heavenly tune which '[b]eacons from the abode where the Eternal are' in *Adonais*. In this elegy for Keats, Shelley seeks to legitimise the retreat of the poet, and his own de facto alienation and exile, as requisite for entry into the realm of transcendence. *Adonais* constructs (and apparently endorses) a 'theodicy of art' as compensation for the 'bardic necessity' of solitude.⁵³ But more explicitly than in his earlier works, Shelley here lays bare the process by which he at once envisages and defers the transcendental realm.

The poem may be divided into three sections: the attempt to accommodate the pain of life and the pain of death (stanzas I to XXIX), the cortege of mourners composed of contemporary poets (XXX-XXXV), and the possibilities of immortality (XXXVI-LV). Urania's entrance and her speech (XXIII-XXIX) function as the transition from the first to the third sections. In the first section, Milton, Dante and Homer are represented as occupying 'that bright station' (l. 38), a position which true poets attain after they escape by means of death the pangs of their living experience. They represent the models for both the deceased Adonais and the poet. Their life is characterised as 'treading the thorny road' which leads to 'Fame's serene abode' (ll. 44-5). In the course of the poem, this abode is gradually extended until it becomes a sanctuary even for those 'whose names on Earth are dark' (l. 406). Adonais is welcomed amongst these as the 'Vesper' of their throng (l. 414). In this community of poets, Milton stands at the centre:

the Sire of an immortal strain,
Blind, old, and lonely, when his country's
pride,
The priest, the slave, and the libticide,

⁵³ The phrase, 'theodicy of art', is drawn from Lore Metzger, *One Foot in Eden: Modes of Pastoral in Romantic Poetry* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina P, 1986), p. 68. For classical allusions in *Adonais*, see Metzger, pp. 60-1. The idea of the 'bardic necessity' of isolation is indebted to Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1986), p. 80.

Trampled and mocked with many a loathed rite
 Of lust and blood; he went, unterrified,
 Into the gulph of death; but his clear Sprite
 Yet reigns o'er earth; the third among the sons
 of light (*ll.* 30-6).

This stanza presents the combat between the poet and the depraved multitude as the primal scene, through which all poets must pass if they are to gain a 'bright station'.

In the first section, a group of mourners is introduced as composed of the 'passion-winged Ministers of thought', the 'flocks' of Adonais (*ll.* 74-5). They act as a chorus under the command of the poet. Their mourning reaches its climax when the poet recognises his own fate in the fate of Adonais:

Woe is me!
 Whence are we, and why are we? of what scene
 The actors or spectators? Great and mean
 Meet massed in death, who lends what life must
 borrow . . . (*ll.* 183-6).

This realisation prompts Urania, now a 'childless Mother' (*l.* 191), to travel to the realm of the dead. Urania's action and speech delineate the overall pattern of the poem. Initially she mourns for her 'gentle child' who has been killed at the hand of the 'monsters of life's waste', leaving her in 'the starless night' (*ll.* 235, 243, 223). But her grief at Adonais's death gives way to grief at his sufferings in life. She begins to mourn not for his night but for his day, and as soon as she does so the stars come out:

The sun comes forth, and many reptiles spawn;
 He sets, and each ephemeral insect then
 Is gathered into death without a dawn,
 And the immortal stars awake again;
 So is it in the world of living men: . . .
 (*ll.* 253-7).

Urania sees Adonais as an 'immortal star' which recalls the 'bright station' at the beginning of the poem. The confirmation of the status in store for Adonais prepares for the entrance of another cortege, made up of poets in pastoral garb:

Lord Byron, the 'Pilgrim of Eternity' (l. 264), Thomas Moore, a mysterious 'frail Form' and Leigh Hunt. The value of this cortege, and by extension, of the whole elegy, is enacted in the figure of the 'frail Form', whose Dionysian disguise and allusion to Shelley himself embody the dynamic of the poem, an oscillation between grief and exultation, between formalised artifice and spontaneous self-expression).⁵⁴ The frail Form is depicted as 'Actaeon-like', a wounded outcast, masked in apparent weakness, whose 'ensanguined' brow bears a mark like that of Cain or of Christ (XXXI-XXXIV). The allusions to Actaeon and Cain suggest that the poet is punished because of his 'sin'. But the reference to Christ suggests that he is a figure of atonement, with the power to take upon himself the sins of the world. The ambiguity is deepened by the imagery which centres on power girt round with weakness: 'the last cloud of an expiring storm / Whose thunder is its knell', 'a dying lamp, a falling shower, / A breaking billow'. The poet is represented as possessing a power which is revealed only in the moment of its dissolution. This frail Form appears not only as an outcast from the world at large but as a figure isolated even from the cortege of mourning poets. Sadness at the fate of Adonais is intensified for him because it is merged with his woe for himself. His need for Adonais to be redeemed is inseparable from his need to find self-redemption.

The mourners are urged 'not to weep that [their] delight is fled' (l. 334), for the fate of all true poets differs from that of the multitude, and radically differs from that of the infamous critics:

Dust to the dust! but the pure spirit shall
 flow
 Back to the burning fountain whence it came,
 A portion of the Eternal, . . . (ll. 338-40).

⁵⁴ Richard Cronin, *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts* (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 171, 191-2.

The idea of immortality, which the third part of the poem will elaborate, is introduced here, and prompts the entrance of the third group of poets, who can function more appropriately as the representatives of Adonais, of the 'frail Form', and of the poet himself.

The third group of poets is composed of '[t]he inheritors of unfulfilled renown', including Chatterton, Sidney, and Lucan (XLV). Adonais is welcomed by this troop after he is 'made one with Nature' and become 'a portion of the loveliness' (XLII, XLIII). Thus the process of canonisation is accomplished. However, the poet hesitates to join the group as the shift of persons reveals: 'What Adonais is, why fear *we* to become?' 'Die, / If *thou* wouldst be with that which *thou* dost seek! / Follow where all is fled!' 'why shrink, *my* Heart?' (LI-LIII, my emphases). The process of persuasion thus takes on the character of self-exhortation.

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,
Far from the shore, far from the trembling
throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of
Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are
(LV).

This journey by boat to the abode of Adonais recalls the journey to the Temple of the Spirit in *Laon and Cythna* and also recalls the panoramic view of the loftiest star at the third act of *Prometheus Unbound*. Seen in the light of the earlier works, the ending of *Adonais* seems to fulfil an ever stronger longing to find a place where the establishment of a community of like-minds is possible. However, the conclusion of *Adonais* tellingly echoes that of *Alastor*. In the earlier poem, the tensions between critique and elegy remain unrecognised and unresolved. In *Adonais*, Shelley chooses to end his poem at the 'penultimate'

moment, while the poet remains suspended between the transcendental realm and the mortal world (Metzger, p. 77). The community of poets residing in the transcendental realm of true Fame is thus kept forever in view but forever out of reach.

In *A Defence of Poetry* Shelley retains his ambivalent conception of the poet as at once defined by his retreat from the world and by his active commitment to the possibility of its transformation. The poet is a nightingale who sings to cheer his own solitude, a formulation in which retreat from society is the enabling condition of the poet's song, and he is also an 'unacknowledged legislator' of the world. But various strategies in the *Defence* attempt to resolve the two positions.

The poet's primary role is as the defender of the vitality of language. The poet safeguards the privileged relationship between language and thought, and hence the capacity of language to apprehend the as yet unapprehended. Language itself is represented not as a medium that fixes meaning, but as allowing the production of poetic texts to which each reader and each generation of readers must find their own relation. The poetic text becomes the site of an infinite potentiality, which in itself functions to associate the poet with the cause of liberty. But elsewhere, when Shelley represents the poem as a 'fading coal', he invokes a myth of origin, the premise of which is inescapably logocentric. The reader's task is simply to intuit from the poem, which can never be more than its more or less unsatisfactory trace, a conception that is fully present only in the mind of the poet.⁵⁵

The poet is advised against attempting a poetry that attempts to act directly on the world, and to be content to act as an instrument of moral good, by operating to strengthen the imagination, the 'cause' of moral activity, and this

⁵⁵ My reading of the contending views of language present in the *Defence* is indebted to Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990), pp. 277-97.

argument generates the essay's climactic and puzzling representation of the poet:

[Poets] are yet compelled to serve, the Power which is seated upon the throne of their own soul. . . . Poets are the hierophants, of an unapprehended inspiration, . . . the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire: the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World (*SPP*, p. 508).

The poet is represented here as simultaneously active and passive. Poetry remains the trumpet of a prophecy, but the prophecy is represented as powerful only if the poet remains in ignorance of what it portends. The poet is a legislator, but only if his role remains unacknowledged, not only by his readers, but even by himself. So it is, that Shelley can at last represent the poet as fully socially engaged, and yet preserve him in a position of unviolated retreat. The poet may sing to cheer his own solitude in the confidence that, even though he is quite unconscious of it, he will as he sings be sounding 'the trumpets which sing to battle'. It is a position that lacks the dynamic energy granted to the poet and to the activity of poetry in the 'Ode to the West Wind', but it recalls the quieter representation of the poet in 'To a Skylark':

Like a Poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not
(ll. 36-40).

The poet's isolation thus seems to be fully accepted as a mark of ordination. Paradoxically, it is a situation that best serves his socio-political role.

The *Defence*, as an unfinished treatise on poetry, comprehends Shelley's fluctuations between private moods and public convictions concerning his own vocation as a poet in the post-Napoleonic era. Shelley has thus far developed his own version of the 'Green Language' of rural retreat, based on the inherent excellence of the poet's sensitivity, but at the same time charged it with

philosophical and political efficacy. His actual designs and literary advocacy of an ideal community are attempts to reconcile these conflicting drives. However, his life runs parallel with his literary work, and both are characterised by continuous fluctuations which become all the more poignant because of a keen awareness of his own exile at the time when political responsibilities were increasingly inescapable. The unresolved contradiction among these moods and convictions has functioned as and remained at once an unsettling factor and a generating motor throughout his career.

Chapter Two: Shelley's Dialogue

Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and in another, the creations, of their age.

Shelley's Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*
(SPP, p. 203)

Philosophy is here actual life, life intermingled with conversation, and its literary representation is only a way of setting it down for further reference. So it had to be dialogue, and a dialogue of such a carefully constructed kind that it forced its readers to re-create the living transactions between the thoughts.

Dilthey commenting on Schleiermacher's interest in Plato's dialogues¹

Shelley defines his poetic visions through a negotiation with his literary predecessors and contemporaries which constitutes a continuous dialogue.

Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* offers a psychoanalytical model of influence study designed to examine all literary relationships under the pattern of an anxiety-ridden relationship like that between father and son. Bloom's theory of influence remains influential and controversial.² G. Kim Blank in his study, *Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley*, adopts Bloom's model in examining the haunting presence of Wordsworth in Shelley's works.³ Charles Robinson, in his *Shelley and Byron: the Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight*, also adopts an approach similar to Bloom's to examine the rivalry between Shelley and Byron throughout their poetic careers. This thesis seeks to show that the Bloomian sense of a 'wrestle' (Bloom, *Anxiety*, p. 5), cannot adequately explain the complexity of Shelley's relationships with his precursors and

¹ Wilhem Dilthey, 'The Rise of Hermeneutics', trans. Frederick Jameson, *New Literary History*, 3 (1972), 229-44, quotation is from p. 242.

² Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973). For a summary discussion and criticism of Bloom's theory, see Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, 'Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality', Clayton and Rothstein, ed. *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Wisconsin: Wisconsin UP, 1991), pp. 7-10. Among Bloom's critics, Jerrold Hogle presents the most positive counter-strategy. He objects to Bloom's theory of 'revision as repression' on the ground that the inheritance of the past might not be as finished, monolithic and castrating as Bloom and his disciples believe. Instead, Hogle suggests the past be understood as offering the fecundity of the mother (Hogle, pp. 19-20).

³ G. Kim Blank, *Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley: A Study of Poetic Authority* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

contemporaries. Instead, it is a dialogue, rather than a strenuous fight, that Shelley presents himself engaged in with the great poets before and of his time.

The philosophical efficacy of dialogue is best illustrated by Hans-Georg Gadamer. The third part of his major work, *Truth and Method*, establishes language as the medium of hermeneutic experience.⁴ Gadamer develops Heidegger's understanding of Being into a comprehensive view of dialogue as the structure of understanding. In a dialogue, one learns to put one's prejudices to the test and tries to reach a point where one's own horizon is fused with the horizons of one's interlocutors. Gadamer argues that the horizon is 'something into which we move and that moves with us' (Gadamer, 302). It follows that this point of fusion moves during the course of a dialogue and will never be a determinate point even at its close. The paramount task is to maintain a position in-between:

The position between strangeness and familiarity which what is handed down has for us is thus the Between between historically meant, distanced objectivism and belonging to a tradition. In this Between is the true place of hermeneutics.⁵

This virtual space created in the process of dialogue remains what Shelley attempts to achieve in his use of the form. Shelley's mastery of dialogue also reveals an understanding of the dialogic nature of discourse and identity. It lends itself to an examination under Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality. Kristeva characterises Bakhtin's conception of the 'literary word' as 'intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning)', as 'a dialogue among several writings'.⁶ This thesis seeks to unweave, as it were, the

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second edn. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989).

⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'On the Circle of Understanding', J. M. Connally and T. M. Kentner, ed. *Hermeneutics versus Science* (Indiana: Notre Dame, 1988), pp. 68-78, p. 76.

⁶ Julia Kristeva promotes a new conceptualisation of the relations between texts, which could be both horizontal and vertical. Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1980), pp. 65-6. She endorses Bakhtin's notion of 'heteroglossia' but shifts his original emphasis on 'utterances' to a Derridean notion of 'writings'. She further expands Bakhtin's theory to include a Lacanian notion of language

'woven fabric' of Shelleyan dialogue in order to explore Shelley's self-positioning in relation to his precursors and contemporaries, most prominently Wordsworth and Byron. Shelley's relationship with Wordsworth remained a pressing preoccupation throughout his life time. The complexity of this preoccupation is somehow clarified during the process of Shelley's dialogue with Byron.

Shelley's employment of the dialogue form begins with *A Refutation of Deism* (hereafter referred to as *Refutation*), which was composed in 1812-3 and privately published in early 1814.⁷ It is one of a series of attempts to expose the untenable grounds of all theisms, a series which includes *The Necessity of Atheism* and *Queen Mab*. In the *Refutation*, Shelley draws arguments from Locke and Hume, Paine and Spinoza in order to disprove the Deistic doctrine that reason can establish the logical necessity of divinity. The Deist (the young Theosophus) and the Christian (the older Eusebes) expound their views in a dialogue with each other. Theosophus realises Christianity is 'destitute of rational foundation' (Murray, *Prose*, p. 100), but remains repelled by atheism which in his view is a 'monster among men' because the atheist's 'private judgement is his criterion of right and wrong, and he dreads no judge but his own conscience' (Murray, *Prose*, p. 110). Eusebes attempts to prove to Theosophus that 'we can have no evidence of the existence of a God from the principles of reason' (Murray, *Prose*, p. 122). As in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Shelley's *Refutation* ends in a note of scepticism, as Theosophus remains not yet convinced by Eusebes's persuasion:

I am willing to promise that if, after mature deliberation, the arguments which you have advanced in favour of atheism should appear incontrovertible, I will endeavour to adopt so much of the Christian scheme as is consistent with my persuasion of the goodness, unity, and majesty of God (Murray, *Prose*, p.123).

and the psyche. See Clayton, p. 19.

⁷ It was later corrected and reprinted in the *Theological Inquirer, or Polemical Magazine* (March-September, 1815). See Stephen C. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1989), p. 92.

The *Refutation* presents an early example of Shelley's practice of the Platonic dialogue, a form which aroused renewed interest among the eighteenth century German Romantic philosophers, such as Schleiermacher (Rajan, *Supplement*, p. 339), and in the British philosophical writings of the same period, such as Berkeley and Hume.⁸ It displays Shelley's mastery in the dramatising of, in Earl Wasserman's terms, 'sharply discriminated perspectives' (Wasserman, p. 11). But Shelley's later exercises in the dialogic form demonstrate that his strength lies in an involuted examination rather than in the clear distinction of various positions. Shelley's dialogic form presents an examination of contrary ideas which is inseparable from a conflict of personalities.

I. Dialogue with the Lake Poets

I do not think so highly of Southey as I did-- . . . I do not mean that he is or can be the great character which once I linked him to . . . it rends my heart when I think what he might have been. --Wordsworth & Coleridge I have yet to see . .

Shelley's letter to Elizabeth Hitchener
(7 January, 1812, Jones, i, 223).

From the very outset of his career Shelley was determined to initiate a dialogue with the Lake Poets, but of these he met only Robert Southey at Keswick (1811-2). Their relationship may be divided into three stages. The first stage of mutual regard (1811-2) covers the period when they met each other at Keswick and Shelley came to acknowledge their differences in matters of religion and politics. Shelley later sent Southey a copy of *Alastor* as a token of his respect.⁹ The second stage of secret animosity (1817) began when

⁸ See Karen A. Weisman, *Imageless Truths: Shelley's Poetic Fictions* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994), p. 182, note 19.

⁹ Shelley wrote to Southey: 'Let it be sufficient that, regarding you with admiration as a poet, and with respect as a man, I send you, as an intimation of those sentiments, my first serious attempt to interest the best feelings of the human heart. . .' (7 March, 1816), Jones, i, 461-2.

Shelley read an anonymous article in the *Quarterly Review* which criticised Shelley's first pamphlet written at Marlow. Later another article on *The Revolt of Islam* in the same magazine (autumn, 1819), whose authorship was wrongly attributed by Shelley to Southey, provoked a violent reaction. The following period of intensive creativity (from the autumn to the end of 1819) might be understood in part as Shelley's vehement response to the denunciation that he thought flowed from Southey's pen. The third stage of acknowledged hostility (May to June, 1821) was inaugurated when Shelley wrote *Adonais* to defend true poets against those government critics, or in Shelley's own words, those 'literary prostitutes' (Preface to *Adonais*, *SPP*, p. 391), among whom Shelley believed Southey acted as the ring leader.

The record of their first conversation reveals Shelley's tendency at once to identify himself with the older poet and to resist him. The identities of the interlocutors are confused in the account of the conversation Shelley gave to Hitchener:

You seem much to doubt Christianity. I do not--I cannot conceive in my mind even the possibility of its genuineness. I am far from thinking you weak and imbecile--you must know this. I look up to you as a mighty mind. I anticipate the era of reform with the more eagerness, as I picture to myself *you* the barrier between violence and renovation.--Assert your true character, and believe one who loves you for what you are to be sincere. Knowing you to be thus great I should grieve that you countenanced imposture. . . (2 January, 1812, Jones, i, 214-5)

The dialogue could easily be read as a monologue, for the references to 'I' and 'you' are not clearly distinguished, an indication, perhaps, of Shelley's eagerness at once to recognise himself in the older poet and to insist on his distinction from him. Southey's own account, as preserved in his letter to Grosvenor Bedford, reveals that he recognised his own younger self in Shelley. He exclaimed to his friend:

Here is a man at Keswick, who acts upon me as my own ghost would do. He is just what I was in 1794. His name is Shelley, son to the member

from Shoreham, with 6000*l.* a year entailed upon him . . . I have put him upon a course of Berkeley . . . I tell him that all the difference between us is, that he is nineteen, and I am thirty-seven; . . .¹⁰

Now an established writer, Southey had become, in Shelley's words, 'an advocate for existing establishment' (Jones, i, 214-5). The ghost from his past prompted Southey to reflect on the course of his own career. The records on both sides establish a paradigm for the relationship between the two generations of Romantic writers.¹¹

Shelley and Southey's relationship has been well documented by Kenneth Neill Cameron.¹² From the beginning of their quarrel, Shelley was clear that their 'personal hatred' was inseparable from 'the rage of faction' (Letter to Hunt, 720 Dec. 1818, Jones, ii, 66). Attacks on private characters were merged with political recriminations. Southey as Poet Laureate angered Shelley the radical writer; but Southey as a poet still inspired his admiration.

As Marilyn Butler contends, Southey's greatest achievement lies in his depiction of the empire of the world and its overthrow.¹³ Southey's endeavour to draw materials from mythological systems of different civilisations broadened the horizon of British Romantic poetry. For example, his *Thalaba, the Destroyer*, recording the entire life of the hero, offered a model for Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805). His *The Curse of Kehama*, while correcting a Satanic Kehama and upholding the virtue of ordinary people, inspired studies

¹⁰ See John Dennis, ed. *Robert Southey, His Letters* (4 Jan., 1812), 238-9, included in Jones, i, 219, notes.

¹¹ Southey's impression of Shelley resembles Coleridge's. Coleridge intimated in a letter to John E. Reade (December 1830), that he regretted he had not met Shelley at Keswick. He considered himself better equipped than Southey for 'understanding' Shelley's 'poetico-metaphysical Reveries'. He claimed that he 'might have been of use' to the young poet. See *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6 vols., ed., Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1956-71), vol. vi., 849-50.

¹² Shelley's anger was stirred by three anonymous article in the *Quarterly Review*, (January, 1817; January, 1818 and April, 1819), respectively on one of his pamphlets at Marlow, on Leigh Hunt's *Foliage*, and on *The Revolt of Islam*. For a detailed discussion of the relationship between the two poets, see Kenneth, N. Cameron, 'Shelley Vs Southey: New Light on an Old Quarrel', *PMLA*, 57 (1942), pp. 489-512. For a recent study of Southey's animus against the Shelleyan circle, see P. Cochran, 'Southey, Robert, the Atheist Inscription, and the League of Incest', *Notes and Queries*, 37 (1990), pp. 415-8.

¹³ Marilyn Butler, 'Revising the Canon', *The Times Literary Supplement* (Dec. 4-10, 1987), pp. 1349, 1359-60, 1360.

of the wandering Jew in Byron (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Cain*) and in Shelley (*Queen Mab* and the fragment of 'The Wandering Jew'). Shelley's poetry, in particular, bears traces of Southey's influence that provoked the reviewer of *The Revolt of Islam* in the *Quarterly Review* to accuse him of 'unsparing' imitation of the older poet.¹⁴ This accusation is partly justifiable, for Southey's poetic presence recurs in Shelley's poetry, for example, the geographic-cosmic-psychic landscape of *Alastor*, the plots of *Laon and Cythna*, the journey underground in *Prometheus Unbound*, the drinking of the nuptial cup in 'The Triumph of Life', etc. Southey's poetry continued to live vividly in Shelley's mind. For instance, in a letter to Peacock (?10 August, 1821), Shelley playfully identified himself with Southey's sea-snake in *The Curse of Kehama* (Jones, ii, 330). But despite his admiration for Southey's poetry, Shelley maintained his opposition to the man he considered the leader of the 'Tory reviewers' throughout his life even after he acknowledged his error in mistaking Southey as the author of scandalous attacks against himself (Shelley's letter to Byron, 16 July, 1821, Jones, ii, 309).

If a separation of Southey the man and his poetry characterises Shelley's attitude towards Southey, the case with another Lake Poet, Wordsworth, is less fortunate. For the younger generation of Romantic writers, Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth were traitors to the revolutionary cause that they once passionately upheld. Wordsworth stood out among the three as a prime apostate because of his earlier espousal of the cause of the common people as in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) and because of his U-turn towards conservatism from *The Excursion* (1814) onward. Wordsworth's changed allegiance affected Shelley more deeply than other defections. Shelley recognised Wordsworth and his poetry as the crux of the Romantic age, both in literary and political terms. However, his attitude towards the elder poet, even

¹⁴ John Taylor Coleridge's review of *The Revolt of Islam*, in *The Quarterly Review* (April 1819), xxi, 460-71, rpt. in James E. Barcus, ed., *Shelley: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge, 1975), pp. 124-35, quotation is from p. 125.

from the outset of his career, is characterised by an irrepressible ambivalence and poignancy aggravated by his gradual recognition of his own fate in that of Wordsworth.

Shelley's attitude towards Wordsworth turned decidedly with his reading of *The Excursion* (1814). Shelley had recognised the elder poet as an embodiment of true English poetry. His admiration had been founded on *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807). However, the conservative spirit of *The Excursion* provoked Shelley to change his opinion. Mary recorded Shelley's response in her *Journal*, 'He is a slave' (Mary, p. 15). From that time, Shelley embarked on a lifelong attempt to engage himself in a dialogue with the elder poet. He first attempted to correct Wordsworth with the romance fragment, 'The Assassins', which seeks to transform the Wordsworthian ideal of passive endurance into Shelley's own 'active ideal'.¹⁵ *Alastor* marks a second attempt, which adopts the narrative pattern of *The Excursion* in order to challenge the Wordsworthian credo in a manner which seeks to correct Wordsworthian didacticism. Shelley's attitude towards the elder poet became all the more ambivalent when he moved to Italy, 'the paradise of exiles', where he began to see himself trapped in a situation not dissimilar to Wordsworth's in his retirement at Grasmere. As a result, the satirical portrayals of the Lake poets in 'Peter Bell the Third' and the 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' are infiltrated by an ironic sense that implicates Shelley with his targets. Shelley's attempts to distinguish himself from the elder poet became still more strenuous in his final years. His project does not amount, as G. Kim Blank believes, to a repudiation of Wordsworth's literary influence, but an attempt to disentangle himself from the despairing recognition that he located in Wordsworth, that the poet could be no more than the passive witness of social ills.

¹⁵ The phrase, 'active ideal', is adopted from Michael James Neth's doctoral dissertation, 'The Active Ideal: Mind and History in Shelley's *Hellas*' (Columbia U, 1990).

As Wordsworth explains in the Preface, *The Excursion*, the second part of the philosophical poem, *The Recluse*, adopts a 'dramatic form', which allows the characters to speak for themselves.¹⁶ The principal aim of the poem is the reformation of the Solitary, a composite figure whose character draws from Wordsworth's earlier poems and whose course of life recalls Wordsworth's own experience. A successful reformation of such a character would lead to a justification of Wordsworth's decision to write 'in retirement', on which the entire project of *The Recluse* depends. Shelley's response to Wordsworth's poem is characterised by a desire to mould a composite character of his own, whose despondency refuses to be 'corrected' and thus to expose Wordsworth's project as amounting to an acquiescence in the established order.

The Solitary in *The Excursion* represents a man typical of Wordsworth's own generation, whose youth coincided with that period in which the French Revolution seemed to promise the fulfilment of all their most generous hopes for humanity. His course of life is mirrored by those of the other characters throughout the poem and thus becomes a reference point against which the lives of others acquire their significance. He is a composite figure through which Wordsworth examines the impact of historical upheavals on personal life, and with whose reformation he attempts to prove the universal solace of nature and religion.

Prototypes of the Solitary are traceable in Marmaduke, the robber chief in *The Borderers* (1795-96), the recluse depicted in the 'Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree', and the young Wordsworth in the tenth book in *The Prelude* (1805). The Solitary in *The Excursion* is built as an intertextual product of all the earlier recluses and disillusioned figures. Raised in the country, his character is formed by his intense interaction with nature. His occupation as a

¹⁶ Quotation of Wordsworth's poems and prose is from Wordsworth, William, *Wordsworth Poetical Works*, ed., Thomas Hutchinson, new ed., rev., Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990), p. 589. For *The Excursion*, I have also consulted Jonathan Wordsworth, ed., *The Excursion* (1814), a facsimile edition, (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1991).

military chaplain gives him a chance to realise his talents for eloquence and leadership. The loss of his family renders him apathetic towards public affairs. At this time, the outbreak of the French Revolution summons him to join in the universal celebration and to assist in the work of construction. His incisive moral perception soon discovers that revolutionary ideals are at odds with the frailty of human nature, but he somehow muffles his conscience by immersing himself in the commotion of the time. Eventually, his conscience forces him to withdraw from the world. After a period of self-exile in foreign lands, he comes back to his native country and seeks seclusion from all human affairs. His journey through life takes him from the country (childhood), to the army (early manhood), and back to the country (manhood, marriage), to the city (the French Revolution), to foreign lands, and at last he retires to the country (final retreat). The movements between the world at large and the country constitute the thematic structure of the poem and will in due course be mirrored in the life of other characters.

The Solitary is joined with the other two main characters, the Wanderer, the Pastor, to form a kind of triangular matrix of responses to the upheavals of the time, whereas the young narrator represents a not-so-impartial observer, ready to identify himself with the Wanderer. The Wanderer is evidently an ideal Wordsworthian figure. He is self-taught in the countryside, forming his character from an interaction with sublime natural surroundings in the Lakes. So nurtured in nature, he chooses for himself a 'steady course', in which no 'piteous *revolutions* had he felt, / No wild varieties of joy and grief' (I, 358-60, my emphasis). Because it is untroubled by 'sorrow of its own', his heart is 'tuned' to 'sympathy with man, he was alive / To all that was enjoyed'. On account of his freedom from 'painful pressure from without / That made him turn aside from wretchedness / With coward fears,' he can '*afford* to suffer / With those whom he saw suffer' (I, 362-371). His itinerant job enables him to be an observer of the 'progress and decay / Of many minds, of minds and

bodies too'. Now in his old age, he gives up this '*active* course' (my emphasis), and resolves

To pass the remnant of his days, untasked
With needless services, from hardship free.

...
But still he loved to pace the public roads
And the wild paths; ...
(I, 383-8).

The Wanderer's freedom from 'wild varieties of joy and grief' results from a life-long habit of detachment from the affairs of the world at large. His detachment preserves him against contamination and disappointment so that he becomes at once representative of and superior to the common folk. Such a character is authorised by Wordsworth to be a sufferer of common human woes, a preserver of faith, hope and virtue, and a judge of country contentions. But the complete emotional freedom that is the condition of his authority, based as it is on a total detachment from the passions of common humanity, inevitably endangers the validity of his sympathy for mankind.

The Pastor, the most prominent character in the poem, represents another point of this triangle. Being 'born / Of knightly race' (V, 112-3), he chooses to leave the academic bower and comes back to his native soil at the prime of his life. His household presents an ultimate ideal of domestic bliss in harmony with nature and religious faith. The Pastor speaks with the religious authority to exhort the despondent Solitary and with the spiritual authority to caution the whole of society which has allowed itself to be invaded by the destructive forces of industrialisation.

The triangular matrix of response to historical upheavals converges on the issue of retreat. Throughout the poem, Wordsworth depicts various kinds of retreat, the two extremes of which are represented by the Pastor and the Solitary. In the opinion of the Wanderer, the difference between them lies in a

sense of duty, which the former keeps as the centre of his life, whereas the latter doubts it as a vain attachment.

The Solitary's resolve to retreat to a desolate vale is not inspired by a love of nature but rather prompted by a search for a 'seat of pure innocence' (II, 618), which can shelter him from the world outside. His character is reflected in his dwelling. It is located in an 'urn-like' 'lowly vale' amid the mountains 'stern and desolate', and is connected to the outside world only by a small bridge. To the young poet's eye, it is a 'bare dwelling', which seems the 'home of poverty and toil / Though not of want' (II, 323-341), for nature visits this lonely place and makes it pleasant. The young poet takes this place to be a 'sweet Recess', which is 'so lonesome and so perfectly secure' that it represents 'an image of the pristine earth, / The planet in its nakedness'. This lonely abode takes on a universal significance: 'were this / Man's only dwelling, sole appointed seat, / First, last, and single, . . . peace is here / Or nowhere' (II, 348-364). Only the Wanderer can tell that the surroundings externalise the 'voluptuousness' and the 'self-indulging spleen' of the Solitary, who resolves to 'live and die / Forgotten, - at safe distance from "a world / Not moving to his mind"' (II, 311-5). To the young poet, this retreat embodies the possibility of reclaiming uncorrupted innocence. However, its apparent self-sufficiency and harmony with the environment betray, to the Wanderer's eye, an unhealthy creativity in spleen. As they enter the Solitary's cottage, they find a series of concentric circles of 'retreat within retreat' (II, 446). The Solitary directs them to a nook, whose 'stillness and close privacy' seem to have been made for self-examination or confession at the 'sinner's need' (III, 470-3). The dwelling is located in a vale at the heart of the 'impenetrable' darkness, sheltered and guarded from 'human observation' by the concentric circles of surrounding primeval forests, but which still opens to the 'influx of the morning light' (V, 1-10). The vale and the nook perfectly embody his state of mind.

The Wanderer reproaches the Solitary for nursing a 'dreadful appetite of death' in his self-indulgent spleen (IV, 602) and at the same time tries to show him that his solitude is not really a solitude, for nature still offers him relief: 'Alone or mated, solitude was not' (IV, 633). The Wanderer exhorts him to see that all of us are bound to 'strict love of fellowship' (IV, 444), and that solitude need not result in a deadly solipsism. The Wanderer thus presents a model of positive retreat, in which the mind knows its proper duty while meditating on the mutability of life (IV, 1026-35). Although the Solitary is, as the young poet keenly observes, 'abashed' by the Wanderer's exhortations (IV, 256), his retreat remains all the same 'forbidding'.

The Solitary's retreat is sharply contrasted with the domestic life of the Pastor. The Pastor's mansion is located on the plain secluded, like the Solitary's cottage, by hills, among 'habitations seemingly preserved / From all intrusion of the restless world / By rocks impassable and mountains huge' (IX, 577-579). In a manner that recalls his response to the dwelling of the Solitary, the young poet offers a detailed account of the Pastor's mansion and its surroundings, how the pathways are designed to connect the mansion with the parish church, how the garden is cultivated (VIII, 441-90) and how the entire picture encapsulates the spirit of its natural surroundings in a 'unity sublime' (IX, 608). What makes this rural residence the highest ideal in the poem is the humble contentment of the Pastor's family. The Pastor's retreat presents itself in every way as a correction of the Solitary's.

The main theme of the whole poem is to trace the reformation of the Solitary. Even before the entrance of the Solitary, Wordsworth presents the story of Margaret, told by the Wanderer to the young narrator, whose response to the story serves as the model for the Solitary's response to the Wanderer's and the Pastor's exhortations. The young poet, overwhelmed by Margaret's tragedy, with 'a brother's love' blesses her in 'the impotence of grief' as if to 'comfort' himself. Then he traces with an interest 'more mild' the 'secret spirit

of humanity' still surviving amid the 'calm oblivious tendencies / Of nature'(I. 923-9). At this point, the Wanderer interrupts with worldly and religious wisdom: 'enough to sorrow you have given, / The purposes of wisdom ask no more' (I. 932-3). The poet is urged to 'read' the forms of things not with an 'unworthy eye', that is, to perceive God's love in the universe (I. 939-40). The Wanderer's own experience suffices to illustrate it. Once, passing by the cottage, he saw the spear-grass on the wall silvered over by mist and rain-drops and understood it as an image of tranquillity behind 'uneasy thoughts'. He then realised that 'what we feel of sorrow and despair / From ruin and from change, . . . could maintain, / Nowhere, dominion o'er the enlightened spirit / Whose meditative sympathies repose / Upon the breast of Faith' (I, 948-54). This moral lesson is now further reinforced by the 'slant and mellow radiance' of the setting sun. They both feel 'admonished' by the mellow wisdom embodied in nature and take their leave of the place. The moral lesson, however, is extracted from, but not an integral part of, the story of Margaret. Her withering away is in fact a consequence of her lack of religious faith. The Wanderer's appended explanation only reveals the discrepancy between the story and its designated moral. Such a discrepancy also recurs in the tales of the country people relayed by the Pastor.

Nevertheless, the first book shows the young poet's readiness to be educated by the Wanderer. He aligns himself with him in wishing for a 'reformation' of the despondent Solitary. Such a relationship between the young and the old recalls similar scenarios in Wordsworth's earlier poems, such as 'Resolution and Independence' and 'The Discharged Soldier', poems that centre on an encounter with mysterious figures. The young poet in these poems receives admonitions from the figures that he meets, in the same manner that the young poet receives admonitions from the Wanderer. After the first book, the authoritative status of the Wanderer seems to shift a little towards the Solitary. But the young poet finds himself harbouring mixed sentiments

towards this fearful figure. The confrontation between the Solitary and the young poet continues throughout the poem and paradoxically serves to bring into question the young poet's uncritical adoption of the Wanderer's viewpoint.

Their first confrontation takes place when they meet each other. The Solitary, after consoling the child of the dead shepherd with religious platitudes, questions their validity. The young poet notes his 'faint sarcastic smile' which does not 'please' him (II, 594-5). He interposes, 'though loth to speak', in favour of the solidarity which ought to be felt by all the settlers of the vale. The Solitary then begins to engage in a discussion with 'this zealous friend / And advocate of humble life' (II, 627-8) on the value of rural retreat. From the beginning, the young poet has harboured ambivalent feelings towards the Solitary, displeased at his sarcasm and at the same time curious about the cause of such acerbity. In their dialogue, we detect a note of angry assertion in the young poet, who feels the integrity of the Wanderer's moral lessons threatened by the Solitary. The young poet remains ever observant of the Solitary's utterances and behaviour as he likens the Pastor to an oak in comparison with the Solitary who is like a 'stately sycamore' (V, 456). But his confidence that the Solitary will be healed by communion with 'uninjured Minds' (IX, 784) will be exposed as no more than a willed conviction.

The Solitary remains resilient in his objection to both the Wanderer's exhortations and the Pastor's reproaches. His contradictory character, which results from a disunion of the 'self-forgetting tenderness of heart' and 'an earth-despising dignity of soul', remains resonant throughout the poem. In the Wanderer's view, without a union of these two qualities, man is blind (V, 576-9). The Solitary is torn between these two poles. However, he possesses a full understanding of himself:

Such acquiescence neither doth imply,
In me, a meekly-bending spirit soothed
By natural piety; nor a lofty mind,
By philosophic discipline prepared

For calm subjection to acknowledged law;
Pleased to have been, contented not to be.
Such palms I boast not; --no! to me, who find,
Reviewing my past way, much to condemn,
Little to praise, and nothing to regret . . .
(III, 263-272).

The Solitary is determined not to subject himself either to humble religion or to proud philosophy. Such a liberated and self-reliant man at once inspires admiration and provokes fear. For the Wanderer, the Solitary is simply indulging in 'fruitless indignation' (II, 293-315). The Solitary refuses to accept solace, even briefly, from the religious doctrine of immortality or from a Wordsworthian faith in redemptive nature. He holds onto an insight into the illusory nature of any solace, man-made or natural. This adamant detachment borders on cynicism and exposes the redemptive doctrines as blind hypocrisy. But he is tormented by a not yet complete detachment. Even as he records that he can still enjoy the seasonal changes of nature without wishing for an eternal spring, he interrupts himself, revealing his embarrassment: 'But why this tedious record?' (III, 325).

His despondency, caused by personal bereavements and a disillusion at the French Revolution, leads him to cultivate a life of complete self-reliance. In the Wanderer's eyes, the plight of the Solitary is partly self-inflicted, because he failed either to redress or to resist the degenerate course of the Revolution (III, 771-794). This is, as the Wanderer points out, the Solitary's 'moral taint', which results in his ungrateful self-abandonment.

The Pastor's reproach is more resolute. Having identified the core of human woes as 'infirmity', the Pastor exhorts the Solitary to seek assistance from God. He contends that the naked heart should not be our sole guide. It needs aid from the 'pure soul, the soul sublime and pure', which will through the eye and the ear foster and sustain us against the fluctuations and decay of things. The 'prescient reason', advocated and nurtured by traditions and 'solemn institutions', leads necessarily to a belief in love and immortality,

whereas all other conclusions are 'abject, vain, presumptuous, and perverse' (V, 978-1010).

But the Solitary continues to inspire both awe and fear. The Wanderer and the narrator alike hold a high esteem for his power of incisive observation and vivid imagination, fiery eloquence and judicious scepticism. All of these qualities are well illustrated in his sceptical enquiry into the moral basis of religion (IV, 1080-1099). Instead of pity, he demands respect for he exists within himself 'not comfortless' (III, 957-991). His relentless conscience enables him to speak the naked truth. It is he that gives us an account of the French Revolution and an account of the British reaction to it. England, having been frightened by the events sweeping across the continent, responded by attempting to curb all challenge to the status quo. The Solitary as a former republican, fled from the British isles in a 'just disdain' (III, 830), and only comes back to his native country in search of a retreat. The conscientious Solitary also exposes the economic hardship from which the country people suffer. He pleads for the restoration of true 'liberty of *mind*' (VIII, 433) in the wake of rapid industrial development. The Solitary's 'ardent sally' at the impoverishment of the country even pleases the Wanderer (VIII, 434). However, in sharp contrast to the latter, the Solitary sees no bright prospect either for his native country or for humankind.

The Solitary declines the Pastor's invitation to his house. Instead, he returns to his 'cottage in the lonely dell' (IX, 774). The poem ends with the young poet's joyful prediction of the 'renovation' that the Solitary will receive from communion with the 'uninjured Minds (IX, 783-796), a prediction not sufficiently borne out by the poem itself. The last book of the poem, which ends with a Solitary still unblessed, looks back to the first book, which leaves Margaret buried in disquietude.

The history of the Solitary mirrors in some aspects the life of Wordsworth. The similarities between them might account for Wordsworth's desire to

expunge the despondency of the Solitary. The Solitary's life gains its momentum from the course of the French Revolution. The 'dreadful Bastille' (III, 709) turns his intellect away from 'profitless' abstraction (III, 696-705), which is a consequence of his personal bereavement, and brings about his 'reconversion' to the world and an eagerness to 'deck' the tree of Liberty (III, 706). He has thus committed himself to the cause of conscience, assuming a role which is historically best represented by the Dissenting minister, Joseph Priestley, who lauded the French Revolution as an augury of the ultimate victory of Christ. To such a cause Coleridge had once fervently dedicated himself. The Solitary more poignantly represents the man that the young Wordsworth might have become if he had continued his involvement in radical politics.¹⁷ The failure of the French Revolution plunged the young radicals into despair. In the tenth book of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth records how he emerged from this moral crisis with the assistance of nature and with the companionship and admonition of Dorothy, which maintained for him 'a saving intercourse / With [his] true self' (*The Prelude*, 1805, X, 914-5).¹⁸ The crisis forced him to confront human nature and eventually enabled him to see into the life of things. By contrast, the Solitary, having lost his family, flees abroad only to return exhausted in both mind and body. He has cut himself off from all consolation from the human and the natural world. He steeps himself deeply in scepticism and cynicism, which renders him a spectator, instead of an actor, in the world:

Roaming at large, to observe, and not
to feel
And, therefore, not to act--convinced that all
Which bears the name of action, howsoe'er
Beginning, ends in servitude--still painful,
And mostly profitless (III, 892-6).

¹⁷ For Wordsworth's youthful radical involvement, see Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: the Radical Years* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1990), and Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1990).

¹⁸ Quotations from *The Prelude* are from William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed., Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York and London: Norton, 1979).

He finally immerses himself in the 'voluptuousness' of solitude.

The Preface to *The Excursion* identifies the principal subject of *The Recluse* as the 'sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement'. Wordsworth thus announces his endeavour to justify his own retreat to Grasmere. An important part of this justification depends on the reformation of the Solitary, which represents a reconciliation of Wordsworth's younger self with the man he had become.¹⁹ But the plot of the poem implies a more reactionary message. The arrangement that has the Solitary join in the French Revolution after the loss of his family seems to imply that political aspirations are incompatible with domestic happiness. If this case is established, Wordsworth is guilty of advocating a truly conservative stance: since the political revolution is no longer possible, a retreat to the countryside becomes the sole enterprise worth undertaking. However, the rural environment that makes the domestic bliss of the Pastor's family possible highlights one of the still radical themes of *The Excursion*. The prosperity of the domestic sphere crucially depends on the political situation. The ideal life that the Pastor enjoys is under threat from the progress of industry. As they walk towards the Pastor's mansion, the young poet laments:

how could we escape
Sadness and keen regret, we who revere
And would preserve as things above all
price,
The old domestic morals of the land, . . .
Oh! Where is now the character of peace,
...
That made the very thought of countrylife
A thought of refuge, for a mind detained
Reluctantly amid the bustling crowd?
(VIII, 233-45).

¹⁹ Richard Cronin notes that *The Excursion* shows Wordsworth's 'self-loathing' and 'reject[on]' of an aspect of himself (Cronin, *Poetic Thought*, p. 104). But I would argue that Wordsworth does attempt to rehabilitate and re-integrate the Solitary into the present society.

The Wanderer replies: 'Fled utterly! or only to be traced / In a few fortunate retreats like this' (VIII, 253-4). This suggests that Wordsworth's advocacy of religious submission and contentment in rural life ought to be understood as modified by a profound awareness of the urgent need for political change. But this residual radicalism, though noticed by the Whig reviewer, Francis Jeffrey, was neglected by the young Shelley.²⁰

But comparisons are never so odious, as when they serve to contrast two spirits who ought to have agreed.

Leigh Hunt on Wordsworth and Shelley²¹

The contemporary responses to *The Excursion* varied according to the critics' political inclinations. William Hazlitt charged Wordsworth with abandoning hope in favour of a supine acquiescence in the status quo. Francis Jeffrey, following his criticism of Wordsworth's *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807), continued to ridicule Wordsworth's use of language and the authority Wordsworth ascribed to characters from the lower social orders. Although he disparaged Wordsworth's prolixity, he appreciated the pathos of the stories while remaining alert to their political resonance. Charles Lamb regarded *The Excursion* as Wordsworth's best work and compared it with Milton's *Paradise Lost*. This spectrum of opinions represents the contemporary understanding of Wordsworth's significance not only in literary but also in political terms.²² Shelley's attitude towards Wordsworth remained personally ambivalent. Most

²⁰ I agree, with reservations, with Nigel Leask, who maintains that Wordsworth never gave up his essentially 'republican ethics'. See Leask, 'Beyond *Frankenstein*: Re-reading Mary Shelley and the Romantics', *The Times Literary Supplement* (19 Nov., 1993), pp. 19-20.

²¹ Leigh Hunt's review of *Rosalind and Helen*, in *The Examiner*, no. 593 (9 May, 1819), 302-3, rpt., in Barcus, p. 145.

²² Hazlitt's review appeared in *The Examiner* (21-28 August, 1814, pp. 541-2; 2 Oct., 1814, pp. 555-8, 636-8). Jeffrey's appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* (No. 24 November, 1814, pp. 1-30). Lamb's appeared in the *Quarterly Review* (No. 12, Oct. 1814, pp. 100-111). For a summary of the collective response to *The Excursion* by the younger writers, see Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background: 1760-1830* (Oxford: OUP, 1981), chapter six.

of his major poems reveal an anxiety to engage in a dialogue with *The Excursion*. He always attempts to repudiate Wordsworth, but repeatedly his acts of repudiation culminate in an uneasy discovery that his differences from the elder poet are outweighed by his similarities.

In the summer and autumn of 1814, Shelley found himself doubly betrayed, by Napoleon and by Wordsworth. As an immediate response to *The Excursion*, Shelley's fragment, 'The Assassins', is characterised by an attempt to construct a community of free individuals, defined against the model of rural retreat presented in Wordsworth's poem. For Wordsworth, Grasmere embodies a 'unity entire'. In this 'majestic, self-sufficing' vale, Wordsworth wishes to develop his 'great argument' and sing in solitude the 'spousal verse' of how the external world and the internal mind are each perfectly fitted for the other.²³ In 'The Assassins', the idyllic picture of the Lebanese valley shows Shelley's remembrances of his brief stay in Cwm Elan valley in Wales (in July 1811 and April 1812) and of his travel with Mary and Clair in Switzerland (summer 1814). But the emphasis on an intense interaction between nature and the human mind suggests the literary influence of Wordsworth. The description of nature in the romance advances on the essentially materialist representation of nature in *Queen Mab*, which is influenced by Holbach and Godwin, and emphasises the rationality embodied by nature as a governing principle of human history. The description of natural scenery in 'The Assassins' shows a readiness to respond emotionally and psychologically to the sublime in nature:

Such strange scenes of chaotic confusion and harrowing sublimity, . . . added to the delights of its secure and voluptuous tranquillity. No spectator could have refused to believe that some spirit of great intelligence and power had hallowed these wild and beautiful solitudes to a deep and solemn mystery (Murray, *Prose*, p.128).

²³ William Wordsworth, 'Home at Grasmere', *Part One, Book One of 'The Recluse'*, ed., Beth Darlington (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977). I have also consulted Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1988), the third appendix, pp. 394-5, 414, II, 170, 204, 1003-1014.

This new approach to nature registers the influence of Wordsworth. Early in 1812, Shelley expressed his admiration for Wordsworth. In a letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (2 January, 1812), he quoted from memory a few stanzas of Wordsworth's 'A Poet's Epitaph'. One of the stanzas testifies to his identification with Wordsworth in their poetic vocation:

All outward shews of sky & earth
Of sea & valley he hath viewed
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude (Jones, i, 216).

The solitude in 1798 produced the *Lyrical Ballads*, which established Wordsworth as a poet of the people. However, it was the same solitude that in 1814 provoked Shelley's denunciation of Wordsworth as a slave and prompted him in 'The Assassins' to re-direct Wordsworthian energies until they became a motivating force that might initiate political enterprise.

Shelley's wanderer is a composite figure that draws on characteristics of both Wordsworth's Wanderer and his Solitary. In *The Excursion*, the two characters are in conflict. Shelley's wanderer, by contrast, comes to the valley to inform the dwellers of the contentions raging in the world outside the valley. Shelley's wanderer has himself survived disillusionment, and exhorts the people of the valley to re-discover the concern for the world outside the valley that had once animated them. Like Wordsworth, Shelley keeps disillusionment out of the confines of the valley. But unlike Wordsworth, Shelley makes the value of the valley, a republic of free individuals who maintain their life in domestic bliss, dependent on its confrontation with the outside world. As Delisle speaks to the Bonaparte of 1798 in *Le vieux de la montagne*,²⁴ Shelley speaks to the Wordsworth of 1814 in his 'The Assassins'. With this romance, Shelley announces his engagement in a dialogue with Wordsworth.

²⁴ Shelley read Delisle de Sale's book during his week in Paris (summer 1814). For detailed discussion of the French source, see my article "The Assassins": Shelley's Appropriation of History', *Keats-Shelley Review*, 9 (1995, forthcoming).

The *Alastor* volume presents Shelley's dialogue with the Lake poets in different registers.²⁵ *Alastor* explores the less benign consequences of the Wordsworthian credo of nature by presenting both the Wandering Poet and the Narrator as versions of the young Wordsworth and seeks to expose Wordsworth's didactic design as inadequate by adopting a narrative structure similar to that of *the Excursion*. The sonnet to Wordsworth and the poem to Coleridge explicitly condemn them as apostates from their youthful radicalism. The intricate ambivalence of *Alastor* is thus balanced by the explicit reproach and pity of the sonnets.

The Preface of *Alastor* mirrors the structure of the poem proper by first establishing a critical stance towards the Wandering Poet then dissolving it.²⁶ The initial division between the narrator and the Wandering Poet is modelled on the division between the Wanderer and the Solitary in *The Excursion*. But in the poem itself Shelley chooses to blur the distinction in order to invalidate Wordsworth's design of reforming the Solitary. However, the consequence is rather that a poem that announces itself as a critique of 'self-centred seclusion', a poem by means of which Shelley seeks to establish his own difference from Wordsworth, is transformed into a poem of self-examination, which in the end fails to offer a poetic vision essentially different from that offered by Wordsworth.

The previous chapter has shown how the critical stance established in the Preface gradually gives way in the poem proper to a sympathy with the Wandering poet. This initial discrepancy between the preface and the poem is in some degree modelled on that between the moral stances implied in the Prospectus to *The Recluse* and in *The Excursion*.²⁷ The former celebrates the

²⁵ Lisa M. Steinman, "'These Common Woes': Shelley and Wordsworth", in G. Kim Blank, ed., *The New Shelley: Late Twentieth-Century Views* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 64-88.

²⁶ The debate concerning the apparent discrepancy between the preface and the poem is chronologically recorded in Yvonne M. Carothers, 'Alastor: Shelley Corrects Wordsworth', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 42 (1981), 21-47.

²⁷ The suggestion of a discrepancy between the Prospectus and the poem is indebted to Edward

theme of *The Recluse*: 'the Mind of Man / My haunt, and the main region of my song' (Prospectus to *The Recluse*, ll. 40-1), whereas the latter promotes faith in God and nature as a necessary curb to unprofitable self-analysis. At the structural centre of *The Excursion*, the Wanderer offers an image of a perfect man, one whose character is nurtured and purified in incessant '[commune] with the Forms / Of nature', and who cultivates and embodies the 'true philanthropy', which shall 'clothe / The naked spirit, ceasing to deplore / The burthen of existence' (IV, 1249-51). The ultimate perfection is envisaged as:

Whate'er we see,
Or feel, shall tend to quicken and refine;
Shall fix, in calmer seats of moral strength,
Earthly desires; and raise, to loftier heights
Of divine love, our intellectual soul
(IV, 1270-4).

The Wanderer offers, as the model of perfection, the meek sufferer, Jesus Christ. The Wanderer's exhortations thus run counter to the celebration in the Prospectus of a strenuous journey into the dark abysses of the mind. The philanthropic nature of the Wanderer is founded on a reserve of human affection. He is, as the young poet describes him: 'Rich in love / And sweet humanity, he was, himself, / To the degree that he desired, beloved' (II, 54-6). The 'deep lesson of love' that Nature has taught him (I, 187-196) actually has its root in detachment from human society. The lesson that the Wanderer offers to the Solitary: 'Peace in ourselves, and union with our God' (IV, 1116) cannot suffice to reform the Solitary, who on the contrary has allowed himself a full and intense human experience.

The division between the Prospectus and the poem, between the Solitary and the Wanderer, was for Shelley evidence of the decline and apostasy of the

E. Bostetter. Bostetter argues that the Solitary and the Wanderer embody the two consciousnesses of the 'psychomachia' in *The Excursion* and that the division might have resulted from Wordsworth's personal insecurity and a sense of threatened well-being at the time of composition. Edward E. Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1963), p. 68.

erstwhile champion of humanity. Shelley sets out to expose the inadequacy of Wordsworthian teaching. First of all, he presents both the narrator and the Wandering Poet as having been nurtured by a Wordsworthian natural education. The Wandering Poet's 'uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius' have been nurtured through a 'familiarity with all that is excellent and majestic'. He is eventually impelled to search for an intelligence similar to his own. Failing to find an 'antitype' of his conception, he descends to 'an untimely death'. The life of the Wandering Poet is thus designed to disprove the Wanderer's exhortation: 'he looks round / And seeks for good; and finds the good he seeks' (IV, 1223-4). However, the Wandering Poet is regarded by the narrator as an example 'not barren of instruction'. In the opening apostrophe to nature, the narrator shows his affinity with the Wandering Poet:

Mother of this unfathomable world!
 Favour my solemn song, for I have loved
 Thee ever, and thee only; I have watched
 Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,
 And my heart ever gazes on the depth
 Of thy deep mysteries. . . .
 Hoping to still these *obstinate questionings*
 Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,
 Thy messenger, to render up the tale
 Of what we are (ll. 18-29, my emphases).

The affinity between the narrator and the Wandering Poet is founded on their sharing an attitude towards nature inspired by Wordsworth. This Wordsworthian view of nature is challenged by exploring its disastrous consequences psychologically and politically, for it fosters a desire for an object able to correspond to a too refined sensitivity and it leads to either a self-seclusion prompted by disenchantment or an acquiescence in the status quo that seeks only to maintain tranquillity. Shelley pursues the Wordsworthian credo to its extremes and finds that only the course of disenchantment is morally possible. At the end of the Preface to *Alastor*, Shelley quotes from the first book of *The Excursion* as if writing an epitaph for the Wandering Poet: 'The

good die first, / And those whose hearts are dry as summer dust, / Burn to the socket' (a misquotation from *The Excursion*, I, 500-2). The Wandering Poet is thus connected with Wordsworth's Margaret, who withers away after her husband deserts her (Wasserman, pp. 20-1). This allusion prefigures the identification of the Wandering Poet with Wordsworth's Solitary, who refuses to be consoled and reformed by the Wanderer and the Pastor. The rejection of Wordsworthian moral lessons is enacted in the abandonment of the critical stance initially adopted by the narrator. At the end of the poem, the narrator, burdened by a 'woe too "deep for tears"' which exceeds the 'vain' efforts of art and eloquence, entrusts the dead Poet to 'the senseless wind' and abandons himself to 'pale despair and cold tranquillity' (ll. 710-8). The truncated quotation from the 'Immortality Ode' not only rejects the faith 'that looks through death, / In years that bring the philosophic mind' ('Immortality Ode', ll. 189-90), but also challenges the Wanderer's faith in the eventual victory of good that underpins his recommendation that present evil ought to be passively endured. The Wanderer refutes the pessimism of the Solitary:

'Such timely warning, said the Wanderer,
 'gave
 That visionary voice; . . .
 . . . when the impious rule,
 By will or by established ordinance,
 Their own dire agents, and constrain the good
 To acts which they abhor; though I bewail
 This triumph, yet the pity of my heart
 Prevents me not from owning, that the law,
 By which mankind now suffers, is most just.
 . . .
 Yet, should this confidence prove vain, the
 wise
 Have still the keeping of their proper peace;
 Are guardians of their own tranquillity (IV,
 295-323).

The 'pale despair and cold tranquillity' into which Shelley's narrator plunges exposes the 'tranquillity' of the Wanderer as an inadequate consolation and even a base submission. Shelley vehemently expresses his dissatisfaction at

the Wordsworthian credo by re-kindling the Solitary's rage, but unfortunately he remains trapped within a negative version of Wordsworth's vision.²⁸

In the *Alastor* volume, Shelley presents, as Marilyn Butler points out, an ironic 'collective biography' of the Lake Poets (Butler, *Canon*, p. 1360). The two sonnets to Coleridge and to Wordsworth included in the volume record the failure of both poets to maintain their youthful idealism.²⁹ The poem, 'Oh there are spirits of the air', addresses Coleridge's failure in Coleridge's terms.³⁰ Coleridge is represented as a star-gazer disillusioned with nature, which rebuffs his love, and disillusioned, too, with friends, whose 'greeting hands' and 'faithless smiles' no longer offer him comfort. Shelley exhorts him to realise that it is his own mind that will afford a scope for love and 'moving thoughts'. Shelley's regret, 'all the *faithless* smiles are fled / Whose *falsehood* left thee broken-hearted' (ll. 25-6, my emphases), alludes to Coleridge's denunciation of the degenerate course of the French Revolution as in 'Religious Musings', 'France: an Ode' and 'Fears in Solitude'. The employment of the youthful ideals of Coleridge to challenge Coleridge's later positions parallels the pattern of Shelley's challenge to Wordsworth.

The sonnet, 'To Wordsworth', is modelled on Guido Cavalcanti's sonnet to Dante Alighieri, which Shelley translated (Holmes, pp. 307-8). The young Cavalcanti laments:

Once thou didst loathe the multitude

²⁸ I disagree with Carothers's reading that Shelley allows the narrator, as a proxy of Wordsworth, to 'identify' and 'correct' Wordsworth's own 'delinquency' (Carothers, pp. 23-6). I argue that Shelley's narrator never identifies with Wordsworth and his attempt to 'correct' Wordsworth turns out to be a harrowing self-examination.

²⁹ In another poem included in the volume, 'Mont Blanc' Shelley conducts a dialogue with Wordsworth and Coleridge on the issues of epistemology and religion. For a detailed discussion of Shelley's deployment of the form of the conversation poem to serve his own radical ends, see M. J. Erkelenz, 'Shelley's "Mont Blanc": A Critical Reinterpretation', (doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 1990). The 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' also conducts a dialogue with Wordsworth, see Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, pp. 224-229.

³⁰ As Mary notes, Shelley regarded Coleridge's 'change of opinions as rather an act of will than conviction, and believed that in his inner heart he would be haunted by what Shelley considered the better and holier aspirations of his youth'. See Matthews, *Shelley*, pp. 527-8.

Of blind and maddening men--I then loved thee--

...
I dare not now through thy degraded state
Own the delight thy strains inspire-- . . .
(ll. 5-10, Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 723).

The ambivalent position of the younger poet towards his senior provides both material and structure for Shelley's poem. Shelley's sonnet to Wordsworth also draws on Wordsworth's response to his own great predecessor, Milton, in 'London: 1802' (Steinman, p. 71).³¹ Wordsworth calls upon Milton, whose soul 'was like a star and dwelt apart', to awaken the 'stagnant' country to its former glory ('London: 1812', ll. 9, 3). For Shelley, Wordsworth was the 'lone star':

'Thou wert as a lone star, whose light did shine
On some frail bark in winter's midnight roar:
Thou hast like to a rock-built refuge stood
Above the blind and battling multitude:
In honoured poverty thy voice did weave
Songs consecrate to truth and liberty,--
(ll. 7-12).

The allusion to Milton is more poignant because Wordsworth now has 'desert[ed]' the causes that he once fought for, leaving Shelley to 'alone deplore' the loss. The young Wordsworth has come to represent for Shelley what the Wandering Poet represents for the narrator of *Alastor*, and what the veiled maid represents for the Wandering Poet, that is, an irrecoverable dream (Blank, *Influence*, p. 48).³²

The *Alastor* volume expresses Shelley's ambivalent attitudes to the Lake Poets, especially to Wordsworth. The relationship between the young and the old remains one of the central concerns in his subsequent works. In the fragment of 'Prince Athanase' and in *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley envisages ideal

³¹ Nicholas Roe also notes this comparison. See Roe, "'Bright Star; Sweet Unrest': Images and Consolation in Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats", in Stephen C. Behrendt, ed., *History and Myth: Essays on English Romantic Literature* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990), pp. 130-148.

³² Blank also discusses another poem of Shelley as a direct response to Wordsworth, the 'Verses Written on Receiving a Celandine in a Letter from England', composed in July, 1816. This poem receives little attention either in editions of his poetical works or in criticism. For its publication and its allusion to Wordsworth's poem, see Blank, *Wordsworth's Influence*, p. 55.

versions of a relationship between the generations. In particular, the Preface of *Laon and Cythna* reflects the combined circumstances of its composition in 1817. It was the year when a review of one of Shelley's Marlow pamphlets appeared, which Shelley thought was written by Southey. It was also the year when Coleridge published his *Biographia Literaria* and *Sybilline Leaves*. The combination of these two events inevitably brought the Lake Poets as a group to the mind of Shelley. In *The Excursion*, the Wanderer acts as a monitor restraining the youthful enthusiasm of the young poet just as Wordsworth, or so it must have seemed to Shelley, sought to monitor the thoughts and feelings of the young poets who would succeed him. But in Shelley's revision of the myth, the old are inspired by the young and give them their blessing as they go about their revolutionary undertakings.

Wordsworth's *Peter Bell: A Tale* (composed during April-May, 1798 and published in April, 1819) provoked political as well as literary responses. Its belated publication shows Wordsworth attempting to refute the charge of apostasy by dramatically establishing the continuity of his work. Shelley's satire, *Peter Bell the Third*, reveals feelings he shared with other radical writers.³³ Shelley's poem begins as a fierce attack on Wordsworth's apostasy, but ends, as Mary notes, as a poem more remarkable for what it reveals of Shelley than of Wordsworth (Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 363).

Once again Shelley ridicules Wordsworth by employing Wordsworth's own methods. First of all, Shelley's Peter is a composite figure drawing both on characters in Wordsworth's poems but also on Wordsworth himself.³⁴ Peter's weakness lies in precisely his greatest strength: 'All things that Peter saw and felt / Had a peculiar aspect to him' (ll. 273-4). This establishes him as an 'individual mind' (l. 303) which creates anew all that it sees, but also a mind

³³ The first of the radical responses was John Hamilton Reynolds's, *Peter Bell: A Lyrical Ballad* (April 1819), which appeared even before the publication of Wordsworth's poem (Holmes, p. 551).

³⁴ Holmes notes that the composite figure of Peter amounts to an amalgamation of the Lake Poets, a 'Wordsoutherridge'. Holmes, p. 552.

which is at once 'circumference and centre / Of all he might or feel or know' (ll. 293-5). Shelley shares Hazlitt's judgement of Wordsworth as the most original poet of the age, but a poet whose 'intense intellectual egotism swallows up every thing'.³⁵ Peter Bell eventually becomes a 'walking paradox' (l. 543). Wandering amidst the landscape which had inspired his early poetry, he is awakened to rich remembrances but remains blind and deaf to all his old pledges and promises.

Despite Shelley's own dismissal of this poem as a 'trifle unworthy of [him] seriously to acknowledge' (Shelley's letter to Charles Ollier, 30 April, 1820, Jones, ii, 189), it offers the most complete expression of the ambivalence that always characterised Shelley's response to Wordsworth. The satirical attack on Wordsworth's apostasy breaks down as Shelley describes a Wordsworth maddened by reviewers who had spiced their attacks on his poetry by scandalous allegations about his personal life. It reveals an identification with the older poet that underlies, and at last overpowers, the repudiation of him. As William Keach points out, Shelley sees his own career as a 're-enactment' of that of Wordsworth (Keach, pp. 95-6). *Peter Bell the Third* prefigures the ironic picture of himself in Italy in the 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' (1 July, 1820):

how we spun
A shroud of talk to hide us from the Sun
Of this familiar life, . . .
. . . and then anatomise
The purposes and thoughts of men whose eyes
Were closed in distant years--or wildly guess
The issue of the earth's great business,
When we shall be as we no longer are--
Like babbling gossips safe, who hear the war
Of winds, and sigh, but tremble not-- . . .
(ll. 154-166).

³⁵ William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 21 Vols., ed., P. P. Howe (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930-4), vol. xi, 86-95. See also Hazlitt's review of *The Excursion*, in *The Examiner* (21-28 August, 1814), p. 542.

Like those men 'whose eyes were closed in distant years', Shelley now sees himself wishing for a life 'safe' from wars. But it is a happiness secured by an abandonment of his youthful zeal: 'when we shall be as we no longer are'. It is an awareness of his own similarity to Wordsworth that drives him to repudiate vehemently the elder poet as in the letter to John Gisborne (10 April, 1822):

Perhaps all discontent with the *less* (to use a Platonic sophism) supposes the sense of a just claim to the *greater*, & and that we admirers of Faust are in the right road to Paradise. Such a supposition is not more absurd, and is certainly less demoniacal than that of Wordsworth:--where he says--

This earth,
Which is the world of all of us, & where
we find our happiness or not at all.

As if after sixty years of suffering here, we were to be roasted alive for sixty million more in Hell, or charitably annihilated a coup de grace of the bungler, who brought us into existence at first (Jones, ii, 406-7).

Such denunciations reveal the urgency of Shelley's need to distinguish himself from the elder poet rather than a confident rejection of a poet whose opinions are recognised as 'demoniacal'.

II. The Dialogue with Byron

*Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
To muse on my own separate fantasy,
My own, my human mind, which passively
Now renders and receives fast influencings,
Holding an unremitting interchange
With the clear universe of things around;
'Mont Blanc' (ll. 34-40)*

Charles E. Robinson in *Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight* offers a detailed account of the personal and literary relationship between the two poets and traces the chiasmic development, as it were, by which the later Shelley adopts a Byronic pessimism and the later Byron adopts a Shelleyan idealism. Robinson grounds his thesis on the oppositional nature

of the two poets in both philosophy and poetry. Their mutual rivalry reaches its climax in Shelley's *Julian and Maddalo*, which in Robinson's view enacts a 'debate' between the two poets (p. 81). I agree with Robinson that the mutual rivalry between Byron and Shelley plays a significant role in their literary careers, but I do not agree with the central role that Robinson assigns it.³⁶ This thesis seeks to show that Shelley is not 'wreathed' in fight with Byron, but creatively using Byronic characteristics to enhance his own investigation into life and poetry. *Julian and Maddalo* illustrates Shelley's skill in staging a dialogue, rather than a 'debate', between disparate points of view. The dialogue developed in this poem advances on his earlier experiments with the form and serves as a model for his later use of it in 'The Triumph of Life'.

In *Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation*, Shelley explores the dialogic nature of identity and the relation between poetry and lived experience. Shelley works within the Romantic convention of the conversational poem as popularised by Wordsworth and Coleridge, by consciously making dialogue both the 'generic frame' and the subject (Rajan, *Supplement*, p. 116). Shelley draws materials from Wordsworth, Byron and from his own earlier works to mould the composite characters in the poem, and by foregrounding the configuration of the characters he develops a poetic vision of life defined in opposition to those represented by Wordsworth and Byron. The new vision is articulated by Julian, who acts as an 'implied reader'³⁷ of the story of the

³⁶ I agree with Drummond Bone that Robinson has treated 'influence' as an 'entity'. Bone maintains that the actual biographical evidence on which Robinson depends remains flimsy. See J. Drummond Bone, 'On "Influence", and on Byron's and Shelley's Use of *Terza Rima* in 1819', *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin*, 32 (1981), 38-48. Vincent Newey also registers his disagreement with Robinson by stressing the creative dimension of their relationship. See Vincent Newey, 'Shelley and the Poets: *Alastor*, *Julian and Maddalo* and *Adonais*' in Michael O'Neill, ed., *Durham University Journal*, vol. 54, no. 2 (July 1993), 257-71. William D. Brewer modifies Robinson's view of the oppositional nature of the two poets by an emphasis on the collaborative side of their relationship. See Brewer, *The Shelley-Byron Conversation* (Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1994). On Robinson's claim that Shelley declined from idealism to pessimism, I agree with Michael Scrivener that Shelley did not adopt a pessimism akin to Byron's (Scrivener, p. 315). But Shelley's attitude towards life in his last years is more complicated than the positive picture envisaged by Scrivener.

³⁷ See Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from*

Maniac. However, the story ends in a reticence which reveals his changed status from that of a reader to that of an author. This 'intentional fragment', in Marjorie Levinson's description,³⁸ reflects at once Shelley's defensive attitude towards his own readers and his insistence on the experiential value of poetry.

The three characters in the poem derive their contours from references to Wordsworth's and Byron's as well as to Shelley's works. Among the three, the Maniac serves as an epitome of Shelley's use of 'intertext' as a 'fulcrum' to articulate his poetic vision through continuous negotiations between different allusions.³⁹ Julian and Maddalo are constructed around the figure of the Maniac and the efficacy of their views of life depends on their relevance to the Maniac's suffering. The Maniac's utterances in delirium also speak for the alienation and despair felt by Julian and Maddalo, all three of whom share the same fate of exile.

Maddalo is modelled on Shelley's conception both of Byron as a man and as a poet. The Preface presents this Venetian count as a person of 'the most consummate genius, and capable, if he would direct his energies to such an end, of becoming the redeemer of his degraded country'. His character is flawed by his pride, by the 'concentered and impatient feelings' which consume him, but he remains 'unassuming' in society (*SPP*, pp. 112-3). This remark accords with Shelley's impression of Byron's *Manfred* as 'indulge[nce] in despondency' (Letter to Byron, 9 July, 1817, Jones, i, 547), his opinion of the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* as 'the most wicked and mischievous insanity' (letter to Peacock, 17 or 18 December, 1818, Jones, ii,

Bunyan to Beckett (Baltimore and London: the Johns Hopkins UP, 1974).

³⁸ Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of Form* (Chapel Hill and London: U of North Carolina P, 1986), chapter nine.

³⁹ The term, 'intertext', is drawn from Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans., by Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley: U of California P, 1992), p. 82. See also Michael Worton and Judith Still, ed., *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester: Manchester UP: 1990), p. 22. Genette defines 'intertext' as the 'literal presence' of one text within another. The idea of 'fulcrum' is drawn from Nicholas Birns, 'States of the Birth of Time: the rhetoric of Cultural Origins in *Alastor* and "Mont Blanc"', *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 32, no. 3 (Fall 1993), 339-66, p. 342.

58), and his reference to his 'mighty spirit' in the 'Lines Written among the Euganean Hills' (ll. 174-205), written after their first meeting in Venice.

In comparison with Maddalo, the components of the character of Julian demand a more strenuous unweaving. He embodies Shelley's tendency to pursue his task of self-examination through a process of negotiating with his early self and the selves of other poets. Julian functions in the poem as an 'implied reader', whose probing consciousness directs and suggests the interpretation of the poem.

The poem begins with Julian's description of the beach, an 'uninhabited sea-side' (l. 7). The bare landscape immediately lends itself to an appreciation in the Wordsworthian manner:

I love all waste
And solitary places; where we taste
The pleasure of believing what we see
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be: . . .
(ll. 14-7).

The enjambement between the last two lines expresses a vitality which demands qualification. This Wordsworthian preference for solitude in nature offers a backdrop to the subsequent account of the Maniac, whose solitary suffering exposes Julian's love of solitude as mere complacency. The Wordsworthian credo of childhood and memory as well as of nature are thus placed under examination by the figure of the Maniac.

Julian is portrayed with recognisable traits of Shelley himself: a delight in metaphysical speculation, an unflinching opposition to orthodox religion and an unvarying adherence to meliorism. However, this meliorist is forced to a severe self-examination when confronted with the Maniac. Julian's initial curiosity to meet him is prompted by a desire to disprove Maddalo's verdict on his 'vain' 'aspiring theories':

I hope to prove the induction *otherwise*,
And that a want of that *true theory*, still,

Which seeks a 'soul of goodness' in things ill
 Or in himself or others has thus bowed
 His being--there are some by nature *proud*,
 Who patient in all else demand but this:
To love and be beloved with gentleness;
 And being scorned, what wonder if they die
 Some living death? this is not destiny
 But man's own wilful ill
 (ll. 202-211, my emphases)

Julian's 'true theory' is outlined in an earlier argument with Maddalo: 'it is our will / That thus enchains us to permitted ill-- / We might be *otherwise* . . .

Where is the love, beauty, and truth we seek / but in our mind?' (ll. 170-5). It suggests that madness can only be a result of 'man's own wilful ill'. Like the only unrhymed line in the poem, as noted by Michael O'Neill,⁴⁰ Julian's 'true theory' is suspended in the air, waiting to be proved 'otherwise'.

The Maniac functions as an 'emblem', as in Maddalo's description of the tower, of human life and also of the significance of the poem. The character of the Maniac, like all Shelley's most important characters, is best regarded as a composite figure.⁴¹ There are four sources for the character for the Maniac. First, the Maniac as a self-lacerating poet alludes to a historical figure, Tasso. Second, the tempestuous shifts of moods and the sublime qualities manifested in his 'insanity' recall Shelley's view of Byron after reading the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Third, the self-reflexive language of the Maniac associates him with Shelleyan heroes, such as the Wandering Poet in *Alastor* and Prince Athanase. Fourth, the despondency of the Maniac alludes to the fourth book of *The Excursion*. In his Preface to the fourth canto, Byron 'abandon[s]', as it were, the distinction between the speaker, Childe Harold, and himself.⁴² Similarly, Shelley in *Julian and Maddalo* begins with three separate

⁴⁰ Michael O'Neill, *The Human Mind's Imaginings: Conflict and Achievement in Shelley's Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989), p. 66.

⁴¹ Wasserman discusses the Maniac as a composite figure, drawing on both Shelley and Byron, for Julian sees Maddalo in the Maniac whereas Maddalo sees Julian in him (pp. 75-6). But Wasserman fails to recognise other presences embodied in the Maniac, apart from Byron, Shelley and Tasso, namely, the Solitary of Wordsworth and Rousseau.

⁴² Byron's dedication to John Hobhouse. Quotations from Byron's poems are from *Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, 7 vols., ed., Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980-93), vol., ii, 122.

characters only to show their inherent affinities. Julian's and Maddalo's relations to the Maniac have been entangled since the beginning with their love of debate, which reveals nonetheless their understanding of each other. The Maniac is introduced as an ironic ploy devised by Maddalo: 'I knew one like you [Julian]' (l. 195) whereas Julian presumes that the core of the Maniac's madness lies in pride (l. 206), which associates the Maniac with Maddalo.⁴³ The compassion for the Maniac shared by Julian and Maddalo and the reticence that Julian assumes at the end indicate their solidarity in exile.

The story of Tasso provides a specific source for the Maniac.⁴⁴ Shelley's original project for a tragedy on Tasso was converted into *Julian and Maddalo* which centres, like the drama, on the figure of an enslaved poet.⁴⁵ Shelley draws his material both from the historical Tasso, of whom he spoke in a letter to Peacock (7 November, 1818, Jones, ii, 47-8), and from the literary Tasso, depicted both in Goethe's drama and in Byron's 'The Lament of Tasso' (written in April, 1817).⁴⁶ By means of the composite figure of the Maniac, Shelley explores the psychological effects which have by this time become associated with the Romantic poet. But Shelley's deployment of the story advances on both that of Goethe and Byron. Shelley, like Byron, depicts an unrepentant Tasso in contrast with the reconciled Tasso in Goethe. But unlike Byron, Shelley overcomes Byron's determination to prove madness as the requisite of genius, a claim which would be found debilitating rather than glorious by the essentially Neo-classic spirit of Goethe, by framing the Maniac's soliloquy

⁴³ Robinson notes that the draft for the first reference to the Maniac (ll. 195-6) suggests an identification with Byron for the second line reads: 'who to this city came two years ago', which coincides with Byron's settlement in Venice. See Robinson, p. 93.

⁴⁴ Tasso as a mad poet is recruited as a Romantic hero especially in 1818-9, which reflects the impotent rage felt by the radical writers during the time of reactionary triumph. See Levinson, *Fragment Poem*, p. 163. C. P. Brand regards Tasso as a prototype of the Romantic poet, see Brand, *Torquato Tasso, A Study of the Poet and of His Contribution to English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1965), p. 205.

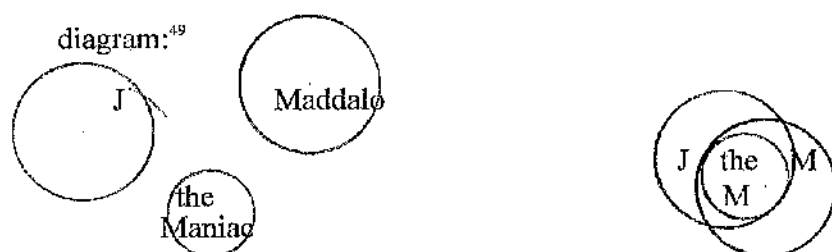
⁴⁵ Carlos Baker, *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1948), p. 135. For its connection with the fragment of 'Prince Athanase', see O'Neill, *Imaginations*, p. 53, note 7.

⁴⁶ Shelley praised Byron's poem for its 'profound and thrilling pathos'. See Shelley's letter to Byron, 24 September, 1817, Jones, i, 557.

within the conversations of Julian and Maddalo and thus guarding against the allurements of self-imprisoning madness, which leads only to death.⁴⁷

The Maniac is closely associated with Julian by their 'creed' (l. 332), or in Julian's words, the 'true theory' (l. 203). The creed of the Maniac is a devotion to justice and love cultivated since childhood (l. 381). When he is frustrated and betrayed, all his resolutions become 'worthless'. His self-inflicted imprisonment results not only from a private cause--an unrequited love aggravated by his adopting a 'mask of falsehood' (l. 308) even to those who were most dear, but also from public causes--'far other seeming'. It is a 'self-enclosed' and 'self-justified' suffering (O'Neill, *Imaginings*, p. 68), ironically sponsored by Maddalo in the first place. His predicament also suggests a possible outcome for Maddalo, who is himself a victim of pride. The shared traits of personality of the three characters suggest their shared destiny.

The character of the Maniac highlights the dialogic nature of identity, identity as a product of intertextuality established from interlocutors participating in dialogue.⁴⁸ The poem stages a dialogue, as it were, between the three characters. Their relationship to each other changes from apparently discrete isolation to form shared 'concentric circles' with the Maniac at the centre. The shape of their relationship might be analysed in the following diagram:⁴⁹



⁴⁷ The comparison between Goethe's, Byron's and Shelley's treatments of Tasso is indebted to Kari Lokke, 'Weimar Classicism and Romantic Madness: Tasso in Goethe, Byron and Shelley', *European Romantic Review*, 2 (Winter 1992), 195-214.

⁴⁸ For a detailed discussion of the dialogic nature of identity especially as manifested in the Romantic conversation poem, see Michael Macovski, *Dialogue and Literature: Apostrophe, Auditors, and the Collapse of Romantic Discourse* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994). For a detailed account of the evolution of Shelley's idea of the intersubjective nature of individual identity, see Andrew M. Cooper, *Doubt and Identity in Romantic Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1988).

⁴⁹ The diagram is a revision of Levinson's 'concentric circles' (*Fragment Poem*, p. 158).

The dialogic nature of individual identity is not only revealed in the interaction between the characters but also enacted in the juxtaposition of styles and in an indeterminate structure which invites the reader to participate and interpret. The juxtaposition of the urbane conversation of Julian and Maddalo with the lyrical mode of 'unconnected exclamations' of the Maniac suggests an investigation into the efficacy of language(s) in poetry. Different 'registers', in O'Neill's words (*Imaginings*, p. 52), of experience manifested in different styles of language enable the characters to interact with each other without privileging any one of them.

Shelley's stylistic experiment is explained in a letter to Leigh Hunt (15 August, 1819), when he points out that he employs a

certain familiar style of language to express
the actual way in which people talk with each
other whom education and a certain refinement
of sentiment have placed above the use of
vulgar idioms (Jones, ii, 108).

The familiar style of language is later referred to as a 'sermo pedestris' way of treating human nature.⁵⁰ What Shelley aims to achieve is not a 'selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation' as recommended by Wordsworth in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1820) (Selincourt, p. 734), but the conversational style used by men of refined sentiment in high society.⁵¹ The conversational style enables a swift interchanges of perspectives, which is an achievement advancing on Shelley's earlier stylised use of dialogue in 'The Refutation of Deism'. The exchanges between Julian and Maddalo conform to the model of Socratic dialogue, as they argue:

⁵⁰ See his letter to Charles Ollier (14 May, 1820), Jones, ii, 196. The reference to Horatian poetic decorum reveals a sense of rivalry with Byron. See Wasserman, p. 57.

⁵¹ Shelley is aware, as Coleridge is in his criticism of Wordsworth's 'The Thorn' in *Biographia Literaria*, of the incompatibility between poetic language and language used by ordinary people in daily intercourse.

[Julian said] 'if we were not weak
 Should we be less in deed than in desire?'
 'Ay, if we were not weak--and we aspire
 How vainly to be strong!' said Maddalo;
 'You talk Utopia,' 'It remains to know,'
 I then rejoined, 'and those who try may find
 How strong the chains are which our spirit
 bind;
 Brittle perchance as straw . . .
 . . . 'My dear friend,'
 Said Maddalo, 'my judgement will not bend
 To your opinion, though I think you might
 Make such a system refutation-tight
 As far as words go . . .' (ll. 175-195)

The multiple points of view inherent in the conversational style tend to unsettle the certitude of meaning on which idealism depends.⁵² The unsettling effects of the dialogic structure enable Shelley to explore the indeterminacy of meaning.

The multiple perspectives are further complicated by the insertion of the Maniac's monologue in the conversation between Julian and Maddalo. The interaction (or interference) between the genteel conversational tone of Julian and Maddalo and the 'unconnected exclamations' of the Maniac's monologue generates the meaning of the poem. The disjunction between these two styles extends the metaphor of Venice, which is itself a product of balance between two forces, that of the ocean and that of the land.⁵³

The 'wild language' (l. 541) of the Maniac is characterised by an impotent rage caught between joining the 'vulgar cry' and 'sanction[ing]' tyranny by his silence (ll. 362-3). He is aware of the inadequacy of language to express his pangs: 'How vain / Are words' (ll. 472-3), for words act but to 'hide', 'like embers, every spark of that which has consumed [him]' (ll. 503-5). His words function as a severe judgement on the words of Julian. Julian recognises from the very beginning the poetic quality in the Maniac:

soon he [the Maniac] raised
 His sad meek face and eyes lustrous and glazed

⁵² William D. Brewer, 'Questions Without Answers: The Conversational Style of *Julian and Maddalo*', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 38 (1989), 127-44.

⁵³ Richard Cronin notes an analogy between Venice and the 'stately pleasure dome' of Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'. See Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, pp. 111, 121.

And spoke--sometimes as one who wrote and
 thought
 His words might move some heart that
 heeded not,
 If sent to distant lands; . . .
 (ll. 284-8).

Maddalo also expresses his high regard for the Maniac's poetic quality: 'Most wretched men / Are cradled into poetry by wrong, / They learn in suffering what they teach in song' (ll. 544-6). However, the endorsement of the Maniac's 'wild language' as poetry does not necessarily lead to a privileging of the Maniac's monologue over the conversational style of Julian and Maddalo, the conflict between which Kelvin Everest characterises as a clash between classes.⁵⁴ The 'unconnected' nature of the Maniac's monologue suggests that the poetic quality of his language is yet to be 'connected' into a work of poetry. His monologue shows a reflexivity that indicates his self-inflicted suffering:

Thou sealedst them with many a bare broad
 word,
 And cearedst my memory o'er them,--for I heard
 And can forget not . . . they were ministered
 One after one, those curses (ll. 432-5).

The density of the consonantal constrictions, 'sealedst' and 'cearedst', and the rhymed couplet, 'bare broad word' and 'I heard', reflect the intensity of his agony. The closing couplet of his monologue further heightens the enclosedness of his self-imprisonment: 'the air / Closes upon my accents, as despair / Upon my heart--let death upon despair!' (ll. 508-510). His monologue embodies his self-imprisonment and despair. It shows an 'obsessive reflexivity' that is imprisoning rather than liberating.⁵⁵ By contrast, Julian posits a

⁵⁴ Kelvin Everest, 'Shelley's Doubles: An Approach to *Julian and Maddalo*', *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*, ed., Kelvin Everest (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1983), 63-88.

⁵⁵ Levinson suggests that the 'obsessive reflexivity' of the Maniac's language reveals that he is 'compromised' by the evil imposed upon him as Beatrice Cenci is 'possessed by her exploitation' and that both fail to imagine a response that is more than and different from a reflex of their own brutalisation (Levinson, *Fragment Poem*, pp. 153, 155).

reflexivity that reveals an awareness of his own ironic oscillation between admiration and reproach for Maddalo.⁵⁶

and I (for ever still
Is it not wise to make the best of ill?)
Argued against despondency, but pride,
Made my companion take the darker side.
The sense that he was greater than his kind
Had struck, methinks, his eagle spirit blind
By gazing on its own exceeding light
(ll. 46-52).

Julian as an implied reader in the poem undergoes a series of changes, in contrast to the relatively static positions held by Maddalo and the Maniac. Initially he seeks to 'prove' his theory true by confronting the Maniac. In the end, he desires to learn from Maddalo more about himself and to seek 'relief' from the 'deep tenderness' that the Maniac 'wrought' within him. He imagines that

if day by day
I watched him, . . .
And studied all the beatings of his heart
With zeal, as men study some stubborn art
For their own good, and could by patience find
An entrance to the caverns of his mind,
I might *reclaim* him from his dark estate
(ll. 568-74, my emphasis).

However, a desire to 'reclaim' the Maniac from madness back to the human community remains unfulfilled. When he returns from London to Venice, he is told by Allegra that the Maniac has died. His design is thus foiled by circumstances. But his refusal to disclose the latter part of the story, 'but the cold world shall not know' (l. 617), implies a sympathy for the Maniac akin to identification (Levinson, *Fragment Poem*, p. 157).⁵⁷ His design to 'reclaim' the

⁵⁶ This oscillation involves the reader, as O'Neill points out, in a constant 'adjustment of vision' (*Imaginations*, p. 63).

⁵⁷ The ending of Shelley's poem differs from that of Byron's. In Byron's 'The Lament of Tasso', Tasso wishes to preserve his story and hopes for his redemption in posterity: 'This--this shall be a consecrated spot!' ('Lament', l. 240). By contrast, Shelley makes Julian identify with the Maniac by adopting the latter's mistrust of language.

Maniac invites a comparison with the Wanderer's design to 'reform' the Solitary in *The Excursion*. By creating a dialogue in which the scheme of 'reclaiming' is of more benefit to the reclamer than the reclaimed, Shelley repudiates Wordsworth's didactic program in *The Excursion*, while at the same time he establishes the Maniac as a cautionary warning of the danger of an extreme form of 'self-centred seclusion'.

The concluding reticence makes the poem into, as Levinson remarks, an 'intentional fragment', as opposed to the accidental fragment of 'The Triumph of Life' (Levinson, *Fragment Poem*, pp. 151-66). The final disdain of the 'cold world' highlights a recurrent Shelleyan device: the consignment of the Wandering Poet to a niche above the 'pale despair and cold tranquillity' where we are left in *Alastor* (l. 718); and the transportation of Laon and Cythna to the Temple of the Spirit in *The Revolt of Islam*. In *Julian and Maddalo*, Shelley comes close to endorsing a more baleful retreat from humanity, as Julian's initially all-encompassing love of humanity turns into, in Cronin's words, a 'guarded distrust of all but selected individuals' (*Poetic Thoughts*, p. 127). But as Shelley states in the Preface, the Maniac's 'unconnected exclamations' will perhaps be found a 'sufficient comment for the text of every heart' (Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 113, my emphases). Julian has developed from a reader of the text of the Maniac's heart to an author who refuses to offer further comment on the story.⁵⁸ He has given up his claim to the authority of interpretation and transposes it onto the reader. It is only in reading that the text of the Maniac can obtain the status of comment on the text of every heart. This forced closure leaves the reader positioned between Julian and the 'cold world' (O'Neill, *Imaginations*, p. 72), left with the responsibility to 'formulate' what is 'unformulated' (Iser, p. 294).

⁵⁸ I draw the idea of the transition between reader and author from Rajan's reading of the conversation poem. She notes that Wordsworth and Coleridge in their conversation poems at times 'elide' the difference between author and reader, at times 'exchange' the two roles. See Rajan, *Supplement*, pp. 112-5.

Julian and Maddalo is the best example of a Shelleyan poem that functions as, to use a term that Andrew Cooper applies to *Alastor*, 'an allegory of reading', in which the relation between the characters mirrors the ideal relation between the text and the reader that the author wishes to establish. The presence of the author and the identity of the characters are not pre-established but emerge in 'symbiosis' with the process of reading (Cooper, pp. 167, 6). The poem as a conversation 'coalesces' the intellectual assumptions of Julian and Maddalo and the aesthetic utterances of the Maniac (Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, p. 131) and enacts the process of the experiential event of reading.

Dialogue as a hermeneutic form, as Tilottama Rajan maintains, elicits co-operation from the reader and at the same time subjects ideology, or any fixed belief, to constant modification and interpretation (Rajan, *Supplement*, p. 109). In his dialogue with Wordsworth, as revealed in 'The Assassins' and *Alastor*, Shelley tries to understand his own situation by anxiously defining it against that of the elder poet. In *Julian and Maddalo*, his dialogue with Byron, Shelley overcomes the anxiety by defining his own poetic style and vision through a negotiation between different registers of language. By enacting the dialogic nature of identity and by allowing the meaning of the poem to emerge from the experience of reading it, the poem articulates Shelley's objections to Wordsworthian didacticism. The poem is a significant model for 'The Triumph of Life', in which the envious rivalry towards Byron and the sense of awe, fear and sympathy for the Maniac are transposed onto another composite figure, Rousseau.

Chapter Three: Procession and Progress

Shelley's Theory of History

*There is the moral of all human tales;
'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past,
First Freedom, and then Glory--when that fails,
Wealth, vice, corruption,--barbarism at last.
And History, with all her volumes vast,
Hath but one page . . .
Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (IV, 108).*

The study of history was represented by the historian, William Mavor, in 1802 as the 'master science' of the epoch.¹ The most compelling form of historical inquiry in this period and the previous Enlightenment era was described by James Granger in 1769 as 'synchronism', a term which insists on the interdisciplinary nature of historical investigation (Kucich, 'Keats', p. 244). This is a distinctive phenomenon that characterises British historical writing of the Romantic period. Various modes of Romantic historiography show a complicated interplay between the interpretations of the literary past and the underlying ideological contentions.² The series of political events in the seventeenth century which involves the Civil War (1642-51), the execution of Charles the First (1649), the Cromwellian Commonwealth (1649-60), the Restoration of Charles the Second (1660-85), the succession of James II (1685-8), and the Glorious Revolution which brought Mary and William the Third from Holland to the English throne (1688-9), became for the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries a site of contention.³ Writers with divergent political

¹ William Mavor was one of Keats's favourite historians. Mavor, *Universal History, Ancient and Modern* (London, 1802), 25 vols., i, viii, cited in Greg Kucich, 'Keats's Literary Tradition and the Politics of Historiographical Invention', *Keats and History*, ed. by Nicholas Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), pp. 238-261, p. 238. The study of history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was closely related to the interpretation of contemporary political issues, which provided the background to our understanding of Gibbon's epoch-making work. See Roy Porter, *Edward Gibbon: Making History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988).

² Greg Kucich, 'Inventing Revolutionary History: Romanticism and the Politics of Literary Tradition', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 25 (Summer 1994), pp. 138-45.

³ See Kenneth Johnston and Joseph Nicholes, "'Transitory Actions, Men Betrayed': The French Revolution in the English Revolution in Romantic Drama", *The Wordsworth Circle*, 23 (Spring 1992), 76-96, p. 94, note 9.

inclinations all agreed that their age had produced a second Renaissance in the history of English literature;⁴ however, their political beliefs directed them to locate differently the origins of this achievement. Shelley, having been brought up in the Whig political tradition, considers the series of political events in the seventeenth century to be prompted by the desire for 'civil' and 'political' liberty, which is the motor of a general cultural regeneration. The liberating energy is regarded by Shelley as embodied in Milton, 'a Republican and a bold enquirer into morals and religion' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SPP*, p. 134). On the other hand, William Gifford, the editor of the conservative *Quarterly Review*, deploys the royalist dramatists of the seventeenth century as effective counter-examples to the contemporary Jacobin theatre.⁵ Coleridge, enlisting Milton to support his later conservative ideology, insists on seeing Milton as a 'most determined aristocrat, an enemy to popular elections'.⁶ The divided views of the legacy of the seventeenth century revolutions held by the writers in the Romantic age had their origin in the controversy provoked by Burke's 'Reflections on the Revolution in France' in the 1790s. Richard Price in his address to the Society of English Revolution established the radical view that understands the French Revolution as a continuation of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Burke argued to the contrary that the restoration of the throne which brought the political upheavals to an end actually confirmed the sacred nature of the English constitution as no longer subject to change. Tom Paine refuted Burke by seeing the Glorious Revolution as a historical example of the legitimate right of the people to change their government and by locating this legitimacy in the permanence of

⁴ For the idea of a second Renaissance in English literature, see Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form*, pp. 14-28.

⁵ William Gifford, ed., *The Plays of Philip Massinger*, vol. I (1813), lxxi, quoted in Kucich, 'Inventing', p. 143.

⁶ See Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence*, 2 vols., ed., by Thomas Sadler (Boston, 1870), 23 December, 1810, pp. 199-200, cited in S. T. Coleridge, *Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century*, ed., Robert Florence Brinkley (Durham, N. C.: Duke UP, 1955), p. 472.

nature. This controversy deeply divided the English Romantic writers in both political and literary fields as their political beliefs significantly informed their different constructions of literary history.

As a radical writer well versed in continental literature, Shelley's contribution to the formation of Romantic historiography is unique and comprehensive. Shelley responds complexly to the pattern of contrary forces, or in Kucich's term, the 'contrariety models' which were prominent in the historical writings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Kucich, 'Keats', 247). First, Shelley agrees with Godwin's perfectibility theory in seeing both achievements and setbacks as integral parts of an ultimately progressive historical plot. Shelley's view of history is also informed by the Priestleyean theory of progress based on scientific advancement. He does not promote a deterministic theory like that of Hegel, which sees history moving along a dialectic course leading towards a complete fulfilment of Reason. Shelley's view is a qualified idealism; though apparently vulnerable to temporary despair, nonetheless resilient. Second, despite his Whig political upbringing, Shelley transcends partisan alignment to identify the motive force of true amelioration as a spirit of free inquiry liberated by imagination, its social basis lying in a suspension of self-interest among the privileged class. Third, Shelley's preference for Rousseau rather than Gibbon indicates that his interest lay less in the construction of a comprehensive historical narrative than with the plight of individuals in the conflict-ridden process of change. Fourth, in response to the revived interest in ancient Greek civilisation, Shelley advocates a renewal of the spirit of Athens. Fifth, Shelley shifts his mode of historical investigation from the discursive explication of *Queen Mab*, to the imaginative and experiential exploration of *Laon and Cythna*, *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*. Almost all of his historical writings are characterised by an awareness of cyclical repetitions, in which the progressive impulse is forever opposed by contrary forces. This might be explained by a 'dogged honesty' (Kucich,

'Inventing', p. 142) which prompts him to confront the temporary eclipses of hope and at the same time impels him to envisage the possibility of renewal.

This chapter seeks to investigate the evolution and formulation of Shelley's theory of history in its historical context. The argument has two points of focus. First, the intertwined development of art and liberty, as in the 'Ode to Liberty' and the 'Ode to Naples', 'A Philosophical View of Reform' (hereafter 'Reform'), and 'Defence', is regarded as emerging from the trope of Shelley's 'historical invention' (Kucich, 'Inventing', pp. 138-9), that is, the triumphal procession as in 'The Masque of Anarchy', and in the fragment of 'Charles the First', a trope that dramatises the inescapable personal involvement in the formation of historical vision. Second, I seek to discuss Shelley's practices in the reading of history, emphasising how the scene of reading in *Laon and Cythna* engages the reader in a confrontation with obstacles to Liberty, how the impulse towards negativity in *Prometheus Unbound* redeems the potentiality of human beings, and how the concerns for suffering individuals in *Hellas* firmly grounds Shelley's historical vision on his self-esteem as a poet.

I. A Linear Progress

The progress of the species neither is nor can be like that of a Roman road in a right line. It may be more justly compared to that of a River, which . . . is frequently forced back towards its fountains . . . yet with an accompanying impulse that will ensure its advancement hereafter, it is either gaining strength every hour, or conquering in secret some difficulty, by a labour that contributes as effectually to further it in its course, as when it moves forward uninterrupted in a line, direct as that of the Roman road with which we began the comparison.

Wordsworth, 'Reply to "Mathetes"'⁷

Queen Mab to the Spirit of Ianthe:
'a pathless wilderness remains
Yet unsubdued by man's reclaiming hand.

⁷ Wordsworth's 'Reply to "Mathetes"' appeared in *The Friend*, nos. 17, 20 (14 December, 1809, 4 January, 1810). See *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, 3 vols. ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), vol. ii, 11.

*Yet, human Spirit, bravely hold thy course,
 Let virtue teach thee firmly to pursue
 The **gradual paths of an aspiring change:**
 For birth and life and death, and that strange state
 Before the naked soul has found its home,
 All tend to perfect happiness, and urge
 The restless wheels of being on their way,
 Whose flashing spokes, instinct with infinite life,
 Bicker and burn to gain their **destined goal: . . .**'
 (*Queen Mab*, IX, 143-154, my emphases).*

A desire to obtain an overall view of the development of human history empowered Shelley's literary career from its outset. The views of history in *Queen Mab* and 'The Assassins' represent Shelley's early modes of historical investigations, which he gradually altered. These early visions share an optimism about the general course of history similar to that expressed by Wordsworth in his 'Reply to "Mathetes"'. But Shelley's visions are sharpened by his recognition of a moral imperative to preach and to purge. His early visions play a seminal role. The linear progress depicted in *Queen Mab* is prompted by an iconoclastic mission, which suggests a firm trust in the ameliorating and emancipating power of Reason akin to that shared by most of the Enlightenment thinkers. This vision is obtained from a vantage point that itself transcends time and history. A similar vantage point is inhabited by the Assassins as a base for their revolutionary endeavour. The 'finished vision' (Curran, *Annus*, p. 26) in *Queen Mab* remains a paradigm to which Shelley always returns, but the formulation and the theoretical foundations of this cosmic vision undergo significant changes to achieve what Kucich finds in Keats, a 'redemptive hermeneutics of historical indeterminacy' (Kucich, 'Keats', p. 258).

To construct his cosmic vision of human perfectibility in *Queen Mab*, Shelley draws on French materialism, the vocabulary of millenarian writings, and the radical political theories of Paine, Rousseau and Godwin. This cosmic vision is characterised, with the help of Holbach, as a unified universe, where

human beings are made up of the same components as all sentient beings and operate by the same animating principles:

There's not one atom of yon earth
But once was living man;
Nor the minutest drop of rain,
That hangeth in its thinnest cloud,
But flowed in human veins (II, 211-5).

Shelley shares a Paineite belief that the 'imperishable change' that 'renovates' nature also governs the human realm (V, 1-3). Erasmus Darwin further enables him to see the whole universe animated by the power of love: 'All things are recreated, and the flame / Of consentaneous love inspires all life' (VIII, 107-8). These views of nature represent the 'changeless' physical laws with which mankind ought to 'coalesce' (VI, 42). The natural laws tell of the 'unvarying harmony' of the 'Spirit of Nature', or in Shelley's word, 'Necessity' (VI, 197-8). In this harmonious universe, men alone are 'outcast' (III, 199), repudiated by Nature as the 'infringers of her law' (VIII, 163-4). The vision of the future-the 'happy earth', 'reality of heaven' (IX, 1)-is at once a cosmic and social 'Paradise' (VIII, 238), where time and seasons are dismissed, monarchy and the church are deposed, selfish trades and slavery are banned. Human beings are exhorted to 'pursue' the 'gradual paths of an aspiring change', in which all tend to 'perfect happiness', as the 'restless wheels of being' are urged to 'gain their destined goal' (IX, 147-154).

The configuration of this 'paradise' provides the foundation for Shelley's idea of historical progress. It bears a similarity with the millenarian visions promoted by David Hartley and Joseph Priestley, whose vision of a progress inherent in the very nature of the universe was firmly grounded on their scientific investigations and Christian belief.⁸ But, for Shelley, both the means of attaining the vision and the ways of realising it in practical terms undergo

⁸ John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (London: Duckworth, 1970), p. 211.

significant changes. First of all, the philosophical foundation of the vision presented in *Queen Mab* was found to be disabling, for French materialism was in conflict with Shelley's desire to allow primacy to the spiritual principle. Later, in the essay 'On Life', Shelley repudiates French materialism in favour of William Drummond's sceptical idealism.⁹ The faith in amelioration based on scientific progress was never abandoned, but the belief in perfectibility increasingly lost its philosophical certainty and was maintained as a moral imperative. Second, Shelley came to question the telescopic perspective that he derived from Volney.¹⁰ The vision of future amelioration is achieved from Queen Mab's 'aethereal palace' (II, 29) as the Fairy Queen directs the Spirit of Ianthe to see the revived past in 'just perspective' from a vantage point '[h]igh on an isolated pinnacle' (II, 246-253). A similar paradise is later represented as achieved by the Assassins, whose stronghold in the Lebanese valley preserves their moral and intellectual virtue: 'They were already disembodied spirits; they were already the inhabitants of paradise' (Murray, *Prose*, p. 129). This is a realm where time, the product of evil and vices, is abolished (Murray, *Prose*, p. 130). They have lived above the cycles of human history, for four centuries have passed, since they first settled there, without 'producing an event' (p. 133). This utopia located outside time is presented as not only possible but even inevitable (Neth, pp. 145-6). But even within the extant fragment of the romance, this state transcending time is disturbed by the wounded wanderer who re-awakens the valley's inhabitants to the recognition of their historical responsibility which once prompted the Assassins to depart from the world. Likewise, the 'aethereal palace' of the Fairy Queen is not the ultimate achievement of Ianthe, for she is exhorted by the Fairy Queen to 'bravely hold [her] course' since all the 'Earth's wonders are [her] own, / With all the fear and

⁹ For a detailed discussion of the flawed philosophical basis, see Curran, *Annals*, pp. 15-

9. For Shelley's shift in epistemological systems, see Cameron, *Golden Years*, pp. 152-8.

¹⁰ Michael Rossington, 'Shelley, "The Cenci", and the French Revolution', in *Revolution in Writing: British Literary Responses to the French Revolution*, ed. Kelvin Everest (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open UP, 1991), pp. 138-57, p. 142.

all the hope they bring' (IX, 146, 141-2). Later in his career, Shelley comes to realise that a transcendent realm, or a vantage point from which to view human history, is not only unattainable but unnecessary. The development of the figure of Ahasuerus throughout his work indicates the course of this realisation. In *Queen Mab*, Ahasuerus as a mouthpiece for the Shelley of 'The Necessity of Atheism', is, in Curran's words, 'tied to the tyranny that he berates' (Curran, *Annus*, p. 22). The Ahasuerus in *Hellas*, on the contrary, embodies the eternal wisdom of human history, which he has gained through his prolonged suffering. He has thus emerged from being the 'Sisyphus victimised by his delusions' (Curran, *Annus*, p. 22) to a fully fledged poet figure. However, he still remains an 'outcast', alienated by virtue of his insight and sensibility from the blind multitude. The evolution of Ahasuerus from *Queen Mab* to *Hellas* thus anticipates the development of the trope of history-making in *The Masque of Anarchy* and 'Charles the First'. These latter two pieces of work centre on a triumphal procession and dramatise the construction of a different view of history, which allows no transcendent vantage point and which requires personal involvement. They together present a critical reflection on the generally progressive course of history that Shelley repeatedly implies in works like 'A Philosophical View of Reform' and 'A Defence of Poetry', which present a commanding framework against which his responses to contemporary political events, as expressed in the 'Ode to Liberty' and the 'Ode to Naples', ought to be gauged.

II. The Pattern of History

Shelley's vision of history both informs and derives from his reflections on the history of English poetry. The general course of English poetry, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was perceived in the context of political and social development. Thomas Gray's two Pindaric odes, 'The Progress of

Poesy' and 'The Bard' (both published in 1757), served as a normative example to the Romantic poets in their delineation of a genealogy of English poetry which is inextricable from the development of society as a whole. The repeated pattern of decline and renewal in Gray's odes suggests a source for Shelley's cyclic vision of history. Besides, Shelley's view in the odes as well as in the 'Defence' is controlled by his need for the radical cause to enlist support from the literary past to vindicate Liberty against the view of a general decline as presented in Peacock's 'Four Ages of Poetry' and against the politically-oriented assertions of general decline made by conservative thinkers. Shelley's 'Defence', inheriting the burden of vindication from Philip Sidney (whose 'Defence' argues against Puritan censures), attempts to rescue poetry both from political reactionary forces and from the calculating utilitarianism that Shelley has come to associate with science and industry.

Gray's 'The Progress of Poesy' is made up of three movements, each of which contains a strophe, an antistrophe and an epode. The first movement consists of an opening invocation to Poesy, the sovereign of the soul, which curbs wars and brings peace. The second praises the 'heav'nly Muse' (l. 48)¹¹ who comes as Day to supersede Night. The progress of Poesy moves from Greece to Italy and to England. In the third movement, Gray praises Shakespeare, Milton and Dryden and places himself in the line of those who have awakened and served the 'daring Spirit' (l. 112):

Yet oft before his infant eyes would run
Such forms as glitter in the Muse's ray,
With orient hues, unborrow'd of the sun:
Yet shall he mount, and keep his distant way
Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate, . . .
(ll. 118-123).

The ode thus includes two lines of progress, the progress of poetry in history on the one hand, and the maturing of Gray himself into his role as a poet. This

¹¹ Quotations from Gray's poems are from *Thomas Gray, The Poems of Thomas Gray*, ed., by John Mitford (London: White, Cochrane, 1814).

linear development of poesy represented by 'The Progress of Poesy' is affirmed by 'The Bard'.

'The Bard' begins with a curse on Edward the First, who ordered all the bards that fell into his hands to be put to death. The bard speaks to the King's troop from the 'haughty brow' (l. 15) of a hill to prophesy the fortune of the nation. He conjures up the 'lost companions of [his] tuneful art' (l. 39) to stage a vision of the future triumph of poesy over tyranny. After revealing the glorious vision of the 'unborn ages' (ll. 107-8), he 'plunge[s]' to 'endless night' (l. 144).

The death of the bard in defiance of tyranny only marks an episode in the unending progress of poetry, for the bard reproaches Edward the First:

'Fond impious man [Edward the First], think'st
thou yon sanguine cloud,
Rais'd by thy breath, has quench'd the orb of
day?
To-morrow he repairs the golden flood,
And warms the nations with redoubled ray.
Enough for me: with joy I see
The different doom our fates assign.
Be thine despair, and scepter'd care;
To triumph, and to die, are mine.'
He spoke, and headlong from the mountain's
height
Deep in the roaring tide he plung'd to endless
night (ll. 135-144).

Just as the speaker in 'The Progress of Poesy' sees himself as a rightful descendant of ancient poets, the bard sees himself as the precursor of great poets in the future. The suicide of the bard does not signal despair but rather projects hope firmly into the future, a future in which Gray will assume a leading role. This poem presents, in Stuart Curran's view, an 'archetypal figure of the visionary poet' scorned by his time but who will emerge triumphant from his seeming despair, a figure who exerts significant influence on almost all the Romantic poets (Curran, *Poetic Form*, p. 67).

Shelley's 'Ode to Liberty' adopts the meditative pattern and sweeping temporal and geographical scope of Gray's odes. But more strikingly than Gray's poems, it enacts the dramatic process of meditation. The Romantic ode as developed by Coleridge and Wordsworth had become an 'inherently dramatic form in which the poet risks the stability of his synthesising consciousness before universally contrary pressures'. The second generation of Romantic poets further explored the 'self-reflexive' quality of the ode (Curran, *Poetic Form*, pp. 78-9). 'Ode to Liberty' presents a fine example of Shelley's cultivation of the potentiality of self-reflexiveness to underscore a precarious faith in Liberty.

The ode delineates a universal struggle for Liberty, in which Athens represents an 'archetype' (Fraistat, p. 184). Athens was founded on the 'will of man' (*ll.* 70-1), and brought order and harmony to the world, which before had been 'a chaos and a curse' (*l.* 22). Athens stands as the 'earliest throne and latest oracle' (*l.* 75) of Liberty, which has become 'one spirit vast' which '[w]ith life and love makes chaos ever new, / As Athens doth the world with thy [Liberty's] delight renew' (*ll.* 88-90).

The brief flourish of Liberty is soon superseded by the Roman empire. Her second awakening is in the Reformation, when Luther 'caught' her 'wakening glance', but Milton saw with 'a dejected mien' the departure of Liberty (*ll.* 141, 149-50). Liberty possesses the power to purge: 'like heaven's sun girt by the exhalation / Of its own glorious light, thou didst arise, / Chasing thy foes from nation unto nation / Like shadows' (*ll.* 159-162). But this militant quality of Liberty is sadly confounded with despotism during the French Revolution: 'How like Bacchanals of blood / Round France, the ghastly vintage, stood / Destruction's sceptred slaves, and Folly's mitred brood!' (*ll.* 171-4). The confusion culminates in the coronation of Napoleon, the 'Anarch of [Liberty's] own bewildered powers', who ironically helps to strengthen the ancient regime

that he had arisen to topple. The French Revolution appears to evince a pattern of history in which the short reign of Liberty is precipitated into tyranny.

Using Italy as a recent example of yet another episode of hope and frustration, the 'lost Paradise of this divine / And glorious world!' (l. 205),¹² Shelley takes pains to explain the true essence of Liberty, which does not lie in material well-being (ll. 246-8), nor in the free cultivation of Art (ll. 249-253), but in a complete emancipation from the age-long antagonism between the oppressed and the oppressor (l. 245), a freedom from any form of external tyranny. True liberty should always be accompanied by Wisdom, Love, Justice, Hope and Fame (stanza xviii). Without these safeguards, the tragedy of the French Revolution will repeat itself.

But the ode does not end in an uplifting mood:

The solemn harmony
Paused, and the Spirit of that mighty singing
To its abyss was suddenly withdrawn;
Then, as a wild swan, . . .
My song, its pinions disarrayed of might,
Drooped; o'er it closed the echoes far away
Of the great voice which did its flight
sustain,
As waves which lately paved his watery way
Hiss round a drowner's head in their
tempestuous play (ll. 270-85).

This tableau of Liberty's departure and the poet's drowning seems to suggest a perennial ideal sadly crushed by the weight of actual events. The previous image of a cave near the ocean, 'Come thou, but lead out of the inmost cave / Of man's deep spirit, as the morning-star / Beckons the Sun from the Trojan wave, / Wisdom' (ll. 256-9), recalls Prometheus's cave. This echo seems to suggest the Ode as an 'antithesis' to *Prometheus Unbound* (Fraistat, p. 220, no. 57). But the pattern of Liberty's departure and return in the course of history

¹² Shelley registers his response to the republican movement in Naples in the 'Ode to Naples' (written during 17-25 August, 1820). This ode shows a similar though less dramatic pattern of contemplating and manoeuvring contrary forces as in the 'Ode to Liberty'. Curran considers the 'Ode to Naples' to be the most 'consummately crafted' of English odes. Curran, *Poetic Form*, p. 80.

and the circular shape of the Ode indicate that the poem is not simply a repudiation of hope. The final vision of the waves hissing around the drowner's head echoes the epigraph drawn from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: 'Yet, Freedom, yet, thy banner, *torn but flying*, / Streams like a thunder-storm against the wind' (my emphases). The hope of a renewed Athens remains precarious but at the same time resilient.

Shelley rejects both Gray's confidence rooted in an assured future and the dialectical certainty offered in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's odes. Instead, he chooses to put his idealism under severe tests. The sound of music representing Liberty ceases in the domain of the Ode only to be renewed in the lyrical drama, *Prometheus Unbound*, which works together with the other poems in the volume to constitute a collective response to the political unrest across Europe from 1819 to 1820.

In the 'Ode to Liberty', the 'voice out of the deep' (l. 15) impels the poet to record its music. In a similar manner, the 'Ode to the West Wind' is initiated by the 'WILD West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being' (l. 1). The entire ode is charged with an orphic imperative: 'hear, oh, hear!' which concludes and joins each stanza. Ultimately the Ode achieves an identification between the wind and the speaker: 'by the incantation of this verse, / Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth / Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind! (ll. 65-7). The Ode becomes the 'trumpet of a prophecy' not only to announce but to 'quicken' a new birth (ll. 69, 63). The same voice finds an embodiment in the skylark, representing beauty and truth. It is also the voice of the Spirits who exhort Asia to confront Demogorgon in order to utter the 'voice unspoken' and to awaken the 'veiled lightening asleep'. Eventually the various modes of the voice are comprehended in the epigraph which opens the *Prometheus Unbound* volume: 'Audisne Haec amphiaræ, sub terram abdite?' This epigraph recalls the dedication to *Laon and Cythna*:

*One voice came forth from many a mighty
 spirit,
 Which was the echo of three thousand years;
 And the tumultuous world stood mute to hear
 it,
 As some lone man who in a desert hears
 The music of his home: . . .*
 (ll. 109-112, my emphases).

This is the voice emerging from nature and from history that impels the poet to speak as the conscience of his age. The knowledge that the voice contains and expresses is an idealism fiercely besieged by frustrations and therefore demanding vigilant perseverance. As the prospect of spring in the 'Ode to the West Wind' is framed in a question: 'O, Wind, / If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?' (ll. 69-70), the hope of Liberty is precariously affirmed in the circular structure of the 'Ode to Liberty' and of the *Prometheus Unbound* volume.

The circular structure of the entire volume exemplifies one mode of the 'cyclic poem' that Shelley postulates in 'A Defence of Poetry' (SPP, p. 494). 'Defence' continues the survey of literary history placed in the context of the entire history of civilisation which he had initiated in 'Reform'. Shelley's aims are two-fold: first to redress the pessimism that Peacock's essay, 'The Four Ages of Poetry', seems to promulgate; second to vindicate poetry against the rhetoric of scientific progress popularised by the Utilitarians. Peacock adopts the visionary chronology of Daniel and the degeneration theory current in ancient Greek philosophy to periodise the history of poetry in a proto-anthropological manner. He deprecates the present age of poetry as repeating 'the age of brass' in the classical period. The 'semi-barbarian' present age of poetry is principally represented by the Lake poets, who '[reject] the polish and the learning of the age of silver, and [take] a retrograde stride to the barbarisms and crude traditions of the age of iron' rather than, as they claim, contriving to 'return to nature and revive the age of gold'.¹³ For Peacock, this degenerative

¹³ Thomas Love Peacock, 'The Four Ages of Poetry', *The Halliford Edition of the Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed., by H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols. (London:

history of English poetry supports his claim that poetry will be eventually superseded by the advance of science. Peacock's satirical essay need not necessarily imply a political conservatism. However, the degenerate course of English poetry that he delineates runs counter to the current view of a second Renaissance held by writers of quite different political alignments, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Keats, and indeed by Shelley himself. The debate between Peacock and Shelley recalls an earlier debate between two literary historians: Henry Headley and Nathan Drake. The former in his *Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry* (1787) argues for a cultural decline over the last century; the latter in *Literary Hours* (1804) reverses Headley's degenerative scenario by enlisting great poets since the Renaissance to supersede Headley's 'muster-roll' of ancient poets (Kucich, 'Inventing', p. 139). In the refutation of Peacock, Shelley outdoes Nathan Drake in expanding his earlier survey of the history of western civilisation in order to prove the regenerating function of poetry.

Shelley inherits his belief in the prominent role of the poet in society from Philip Sidney. Sidney defended poesy against Puritan censures by assembling etymological and historical evidence that poets since ancient times have performed the role of a maker (in Latin) and a prophet (in Greek). Basing his arguments on Sidney's socio-political survey, Shelley further elevates the poet to the status of a creator and a 'legislator'. Shelley's expanded view of poetry, which comprehends any writing, prose or verse, that represents the 'very image of life expressed in its eternal truth' (*SPP*, p. 485) and any institution, civil as well as creative, that vitalises the spirit of freedom, leads him to uphold the absolute supremacy of poetry in securing the amelioration of society. Poetry does not simply reflect the social conditions from which it arises. The most eminent example of this mutual influence is found in Athenian drama at the time of Pericles and a negative example is in Restoration drama. More

Constable, 1924-34), vol. viii. 20.

importantly, poetry also helps to preserve a resilient hope in humanity even under a corrupt regime, like the bucolic and erotic writings of the Greco-Roman period after Pericles. But most significantly, poetry augurs a renewal of Liberty and directs the progress of civilisation in general. The most eminent episode of this revival is the Renaissance, whose vigour and glory are seen revived in Shelley's own times. The social function of poetry insisted on in the 'Defence' indicates a determined shift in Shelley's thought. In 'The Assassins', artefacts are regarded only as the passive reflection of the social environment from which they are produced, like the ancient ruins in the valley of Bethzatanai which with their '[p]iercing genius and consummate prudence' 'surpass' the palaces of the 'Caliphs and the Caesars' in that the former express a splendour which is not tyrannical (Murray, *Prose*, pp. 126-7). By contrast, poetry in *Laon and Cythna*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and finally in *Hellas* is seen to possess an active power to purge the ills of society.

The active role of the poet in society, for Shelley, is epitomised by the three epic poets, Homer, Dante and Milton. Milton and Dante, especially, embody the cause of Liberty in religious, civil, and creative terms. Their achievements have an impact on human history much more essential and permanent than the philosophical and social theories of the Enlightenment thinkers (*SPP*, p. 502). Dante and Milton succeed, in Shelley's view, in distinguishing their own creed from that of the people, and thus play a crucial role in achieving historical progress. Shelley notes that Dante 'at least appears to wish' to mark the full extent of his creed by elevating the minor Trojan warrior Riphaeus, whom Virgil calls the 'one man who was most just' but whose righteousness was not considered by the Gods, to the fifth circle of Paradiso. On the other hand, Milton's *Paradise Lost* contains for Shelley a 'philosophical refutation of that system of which, by a strange and natural antithesis, it has been a chief popular support'. Shelley's insistence on seeing Milton's Satan as a superior moral being to the Christian God might reveal his political alignment with the radical

writers.¹⁴ But he understands Milton together with Dante as representing the spirit of free inquiry which manifests itself in the political as well as literary spheres. Dante and Milton are represented as fulfilling a role that writers in Shelley's own times are encouraged to emulate.

The 'Defence' insists that poetry is 'the most unfailing herald, companion and follower, of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution'. In this sense, Shelley regards the poet as the 'legislator' of the age (p. 508). But he also distinguishes between two kinds of poetry, one in the service of the established powers, the other of conscience. The first is what Edmund Burke defines as 'artifice' which functions to maintain the concept of historical continuity. This is a form of poetry far more dangerous than the depraved Restoration drama because it works to uphold an unjust establishment. Shelley had earlier in 'Reform' condemned the pageant of arms as corrupting the imagination of the people (David Lee Clark, p. 260). In contrast to the true poet who is a 'true friend of humankind' and 'true patriot' (p. 258), the sycophantic poets choose to support the regime out of a regard for their own interest. This distinction between true and 'false' poetry is dramatised in the contrary comments on royal pageantry in works like *The Mask of Anarchy* and 'Charles the First'.

III. Pageantry--the Process of History-Making

Shelley chose not to rest with the view of history inherited from Godwin, a view that regards the largely progressive course of history as incorporating contrary forces. Contemporary political events continued to confront him with darker and seemingly invincible powers of retrogression and corruption, compelling him to develop an appropriate mode of inquiry into the nature of

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of Milton's significance to the Romantic writers, see Lucy Newlyn, *'Paradise Lost' and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford: OUP, 1993).

history-making, and a literary mode that is adequate to articulate his historical insight at a time of crisis. 'A Philosophical View of Reform' is a piece of reasoned prose addressing enlightened readers on their historical responsibility at the present moment of mounting social unrest.¹⁵ It presents a comprehensive framework for Shelley's historical investigation. *The Masque of Anarchy* attempts to reach the lower orders of society to instruct them in an alternative means of resistance. The unfinished drama, 'Charles the First', seeks to represent the English revolution of the seventeenth century in relation to Shelley's own time in order to shed light on both revolutionary periods and to prevent a repetition of the earlier fiasco. These two literary works are connected by the central image of a masque: the former might be seen as an allegorical antimasque to the latter.¹⁶ This controlling image foregrounds the process of interpretation and highlights the power relations between the oppressor who monopolises interpretation and the oppressed who are deprived of a voice even to articulate their indignation. The poet's function is to intervene between these two parties and to preserve a 'public sphere', in Jurgen Habermas's sense, which will safeguard the spirit of Liberty. These two works refer to the historical background surveyed in the 'Reform' and implement, if only imaginatively, the suggested solutions expounded in the unfinished pamphlet.

In the 'Reform', Shelley follows the tradition of Whig historians in regarding the seventeenth-century English revolution as the pivot of the social and literary as well as political developments of England. Shelley's burden of

¹⁵ Shelley wrote to his publisher, Ollier, on 15 December, 1819, 'I intend it ['Reform'] to be an instructive and readable book, appealing from the passions to the reason of men'. See Jones, ii, 164.

¹⁶ There is another work centring on the image of a masque, 'Oedipus Tyrannus: or Swellfoot the Tyrant'. Inspired by Queen Caroline's entrance to London. This play exhausts the satirical possibilities implicit in the convention of the royal masque to express Shelley's dissatisfaction at the monarchy and his keen awareness of the danger of a mass anarchy. This play, though relevant, exceeds the scope of this chapter. For a detailed discussion of the play in relation to 'The Masque of Anarchy', see Steven E. Jones, *Shelley's Satire: Violence, Exhortation, and Authority* (Dekalb: North Illinois UP, 1994), chapter six.

proof in 1819 is doubled for he not only seeks, as Catherine Macaulay did,¹⁷ to redeem the English revolution from the royalists' deployment of it as the legitimisation of the crown, he also needs to engage in the constitutional controversy provoked by Edmund Burke in the 1790s and most importantly to relate the historical debate to the concerns of his own time. The association of the English revolution and the French Revolution had been suggested by the Dissenting preacher Richard Price in his address, 'On the Love of Our Country' (4 November, 1789), to the English Revolution Society on the centenary of the Glorious Revolution, and firmly established by Burke's 'Reflections on the Revolution in France' (1 November, 1790). Price and later Tom Paine among other radicals employed the Glorious Revolution as an example to authorise their republican belief that the people's right to give consent to or to topple their government ought not to be violated. However, Burke used the Glorious Revolution to denounce the regicidal and patricidal rebellions in France and to represent the English constitution, the sacred foundation of hereditary rule, as beyond any challenge. Shelley adapts the view of Catherine Macaulay in arguing that the Glorious Revolution represented merely a 'compromise' between the 'unextinguishable spirit of Liberty' and the 'ever-watchful spirit of fraud and tyranny' (David Lee Clark, p.232).¹⁸ The 'fruit' of that 'vaunted event', the constitution which establishes the 'will of the people' as the sacred foundation of the government, is seen by Shelley and Macaulay as conducive to the 'progress of civilisation and society' (p. 232). But Shelley, like Godwin, was more sceptical, though for rather different reasons. The Shelley of 1819

¹⁷ Catherine Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Elevation of that of the Burnswick Line*, 8 vols. (London: J. Nourse, 1763-1783).

¹⁸ Catherine Macaulay commented on the ascension of William III and Mary, the event that concluded the series of upheavals, as a 'delusion', by which the 'vulgar part of society have been taught to consider the protestant succession in the illustrious house of Hanover as an advantage adequate to all the blessings which flow from good government, and the enjoyment of a well regulated freedom'. She concludes her eight-volume history by quoting the second address to the public from the Society for Constitutional Information: 'Wretched nation, . . . that did not understand that it was a matter of no consequence in what name, or by what party, they were enslaved' (Catherine Macaulay, VIII, 337-8).

gradually shifted from his youthful radicalism to endorse a programme of parliamentary reform.¹⁹

The social structure had changed radically since the seventeenth century. Monarchy, aristocracy and episcopacy, the three pillars of the ruling body, thrived on the increasing oppression of the lower social order, which had never been represented in parliament. The misery of the poor had only been aggravated by the emergence of another 'aristocratic' class, the middle class thriving on commerce.²⁰ It is in order to promote the representation of the 'fourth class' that Shelley promulgates the reform of parliament (p. 242). Shelley appeals to the enlightened few, the 'true patriots', themselves members of the privileged class, to take up their responsibility as 'active citizens' rather than 'passive subjects'. Reform must start within the parliament. Furthermore, other unjust policies ought to be abolished, such as standing armies, national debts, etc. If the government remains obstinate in refusing to concede reform, Shelley warns the nation of the danger of insurrection. The Peterloo massacre presents a case in point. What a 'true patriot' ought to do, is to 'exhort' the people to preserve 'temperance' and courage in confrontation with the cavalry, a strategy which, he maintains, will prove more effective than 'active resistance' (p. 257). Violence might be avoided if the people foresee that violence only breeds violence. The enlightened should seek to publish 'the boldest truths' in the most 'fearless' manner to awaken the people on both sides

¹⁹ Shelley wrote to Elizabeth Hitchener (27 Feb., 1812) during his campaign for Irish Catholic emancipation: 'I cannot bear to hear people talk of the Glorious Revolution of 1688.--was that period glorious when with a presumption only equalled by their stupidity . . . [that] Parliament affected to pass an act delivering over themselves and their posterity to the remotest period of time to Mary and William and their posterity.--I saw this Act yesterday for the first time: and my blood boils to think that Sidney's and Hampden's blood was wasted thus, that even the defenders of liberty as they are called were sunk thus low, and thus attempt[ed] to arrest the perfectibility of human nature'. Jones, i, 264.

²⁰ Shelley, born to the landed gentry, regarded with suspicion the 'nouveau riche', whose wealth depended on industry and commerce. For Shelley's 'agrarian' reactionary attitude, see Passmore, p. 193, and Donald. H. Reiman, 'Shelley in His Time', Spencer Hall, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Shelley's Poetry* (New York: MLA, 1990), pp. 120-6. Michael Scrivener offers a well-grounded explanation of Shelley's limitations as a radical thinker, p. 317.

to the calamity into which oppression and hatred have plunged them. A denunciation of the pageantry of arms and badges paves the way for a distinction between true art that awakens humanity and an art that fawns on established power and corrupts men's minds. The latter is the kind of art that Burke endorses as consecrating the regal pomp of the crown. The issue of true art is later taken up both in *The Masque of Anarchy*, and in 'Charles the First'. At the close of this unfinished pamphlet, Shelley takes pains to caution against the demand for retribution voiced by irresponsible demagogues and to reiterate that the Promethean virtues remain the unfailing safeguards of gradual reform. However, the threat of using physical force to secure change is never abandoned. Shelley even goes so far as to sanction the execution of Charles the first as an example of the triumph of 'public justice' (p. 232). Shelley puts into practice the political doctrines of Godwin in advocating a gradual parliamentary reform and promoting the dissemination of knowledge as the true dynamism of progress, but Shelley does not rule out the possibility of revolution.²¹

*Lo, giving substance to my words, behold
At once the sign and the thing signified--
the second citizen in 'Charles the First' (I, 159-168)*

English society in the wake of the Napoleonic wars found itself embroiled in tensions similar to those which triggered the seventeenth-century revolution. The Whig historian Catherine Macaulay in her *History* tried to redeem the earlier English revolutions from appropriation by the Tories, and at the same time highlighted the purposeless suffering that individuals underwent in

²¹ Godwin, too, gives a cautious assent to revolutionary action if it is unavoidable. He holds that if the circumstances require, politicians ought not to withdraw themselves from a situation which does not comply with their 'propriety' if it seems likely to secure social improvement on a large scale. William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 280-1.

historical upheavals.²² Macaulay's *History* and her polemical writings were highly regarded in the Godwin circle. Mary Wollstonecraft praised Macaulay as a woman with 'the greatest abilities, undoubtedly, that this country has ever produced'.²³ Godwin urged his daughter as early as 1818 to embark on a similar project to that of Macaulay, and later produced himself a four-volume *History of the Commonwealth of England* (published 1824-8).²⁴ Shelley, under the inspiration of Macaulay and Godwin, began to write a drama on the English revolution at the end of 1819 and wrote the bulk of it in early 1822 before finally abandoning it to concentrate on 'The Triumph of Life'.²⁵ The play is built on the common premise shared by the liberal writers in Shelley's own time, as much as in the mid-seventeenth century, that religious intolerance, political oppression, and economic hardship had accumulated to the extent that a civil war would result.²⁶ But Shelley is determined to overcome his own 'party spirit', as he wrote to Ollier (11 Jan., 1821, Jones, ii, 372). Shelley's play begins in the period before the outbreak of civil war, when Charles the First attempted to gather more funds for his military expansion abroad despite the opposition of parliament. Shelley, following David Hume, depicts a Charles ill-guided and easily swayed by Queen Henrietta and his wolfish advisers, Laud and Strafford, and presents Hampden as an idealist statesman, distinguished from the Puritan zealots, with whom

²² For Macaulay's attempt to redeem the Glorious Revolution, see her *History of England*, iv, 7; vi, viii; viii, 338. For her attention to suffering individuals in relation to the historical writings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Kucich, *Inventing*, p. 142, and his earlier article, 'Romanticism and Feminist Historiography', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 24 (Spring, 1993), 133-40.

²³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed., by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1989), vol. v, 174-5.

²⁴ For Mary Shelley's understanding of the English Civil War in the nineteenth chapter of *Frankenstein*, and for her intention to write a play based on this period, see Mary's note to the 1822 edition of Shelley's poems (Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 676).

²⁵ For details of composition and sources, see Cameron, *Golden Years*, pp. 144-2, p. 638, note 40.

²⁶ For the parallels between these two periods perceived by the nineteenth century writers, see Scrivener, pp. 297-301, Johnston, pp. 76-96; and Steven Jones, "'Choose Reform or Civil War": Shelley, the English Revolution, and the Problem of Succession', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 25 (Summer 1994), pp. 145-9, p. 145.

Cromwell is associated. Shelley's play is thus preoccupied with a 'moral ambivalence' (Johnston, p. 85), uneasily undecided whether to denounce the King or the regicide. To enforce the historical relevance of the seventeenth century to his own time, Shelley devises several incidents of 'creative anachronism' (Johnston, p. 84). These devices are best organised around the masque, an actual event that summarised the conflicting tensions in the society of the two periods.

Shelley dramatises the extravagant pageant which was presented by the Inns of Court in 1633 to show their loyalty to the king shortly after the treason trial of the Puritan lawyer, William Prynne (Cameron, *Golden Years*, p. 413). This pageant offers a fit occasion for Shelley to stage an examination of the process of history-making, and of the role of art during that process. The masque inspires the gratitude of a young man:

'tis like the bright procession
Of skiey visions in a solemn dream
From which men wake as from a Paradise,
And draw new strength to tread the thorns of
life (I, 17-20)

In contrast to the admiring youth, the older citizens express their disapproval of the courtly pomp. The second citizen remarks on the entrance of the antimasque:

Here is the health
Followed by grim disease, glory by shame,
Waste by lame famine, wealth by squalid want,
And England's sin by England's punishment.
And, as the effect pursues the cause foregone,
Lo, giving substance to my words, behold
At once the sign and the thing signified-- . . .
(I, 162-168).

This incisive comment exposes the youth's reply as at best credulous, and at worst callously indifferent to his suffering fellow countrymen and women: "Tis but / The anti-masque, and serves as discords do / In sweetest music' (I, 174-6).

The youth is determined to enjoy the momentary splendour of the masque despite the 'dissonant thoughts' (I, 132) provoked by the older citizens. He cannot but burst into praise:

See how gloriously
The mettled horses in the torchlight stir
Their gallant riders, while they check their
pride,
Like shapes of some diviner element
Than English air, and beings nobler than
The envious and admiring multitude
(I, 144-9)

To the youth, the masque not only expresses the splendour of the court, but more importantly confirms the rightful supremacy of the king over his subjects. The established social hierarchy is thus reflected in and affirmed by the masque. These two contrasting views of the masque constitute the two poles of the debate that is central to the play.

Both sides employ natural imagery to underpin their belief. For the youth, the masque followed by its antimasque enacts the natural succession of seasons: 'Who would love May flowers / If they succeeded not to Winter's flaw' (I, 176-7). It follows that the royal succession is sanctioned by nature. Any attempt to thwart this smooth succession is regarded as 'usurpation' (II, 160), wilfully tampering with the divine order, as the King states:

[It seems] now as the baser elements
Had mutinied against the golden sun
That kindles them to harmony, and quells
Their self-destroying rapine (II, 141-4).

Strafford advises the King to let Nature be an arbiter between the rival factions by bringing forth war or pestilence (II, 150-70). Strafford's argument supplies a vicious political edge to Malthus's population theory. Shelley, sharing his sentiments with Godwin and other liberals, deplored Malthus's theory as immorally supporting the monarchy and the priesthood at the expense of the

poor (pp. 247-8).²⁷ Strafford's counsel exposes the political potential of Malthus's theory to support the monarchy in a conspiracy against the general well-being of the people. The strongly militant rhetoric employed by Strafford recalling the vehement invective of the second citizen highlights the reciprocity of hatred, which the logic of violence only aggravates.

Natural succession also provides an analogy for the liberals. As the second citizen remarks at the entrance of the pageant:

This Charles the First
Rose like the equinoctial sun. . . .
By vapours, through whose threatening
ominous veil
Darting his altered influence he has gained
This height of noon--from which he must
decline
Amid the darkness of conflicting storms,
To dank extinction and to latest night . . .
(I, 46-52).

The comparison to the sun suggests an effective anachronism, for it alludes to Louis XIV, the Sun King, with an anticipation of his decapitated successor Louis XVI. The second citizen sees in the masque an Ozymandian lesson (Jones, 'Succession', p. 146). The tyrannical regime at its height is compared to an equinoctial sun whose glory is but vaporous and soon to decline. The Youth's praise of the procession as 'glorious' is exposed as ironic, because such extravagance will only worsen the political crisis. For the second citizen the natural cycle underscores the inevitability of political change: 'Canst thou discern / The signs of seasons, yet perceive no hint / Of change in that stage-scene in which thou art / Not a spectator but an actor?' (I, 33-6). At moments of historical crisis, no one is allowed to remain a spectator. Each citizen, especially one as perceptive and sensitive as the youth, should undertake the

²⁷ In the Preface to *Laon and Cythra*, Shelley refutes Malthus's theory as 'calculated to lull the oppressor of mankind into the security of everlasting triumph', (Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 34). In the 'Reform', Malthus is referred to as 'a writer of the present day (a priest of course, for his doctrines are those of a eunuch and of a tyrant)' (David Lee Clark, pp. 247-8).

responsibility of awakening the rulers as well as the ruled to the pressing reality of their situation.

The bewildered state of the king is the centre of the second scene. Shelley depicts Charles the First as a weak king led astray by his manipulative counsellors (Cameron, *Golden Years*, p. 418). Shelley's characterisation of Charles illustrates his view that in an unjust government the rulers are as much victims as the oppressed.

Shelley seems to suggest two possible resolutions to the crisis both of which contain pointed relevance to his own time: firstly a large-scale reform of parliament and the removal of power from the monarchy and the church, the latter of which is the 'root' (I, 103-4) of all evils, and secondly the establishment of a new nation in America, the nation envisaged by Hampden:

Fair star, . . .
Oh, light us to the isles of the evening land!
Like floating Edens cradled in the glimmer
Of sunset, . . .
Where Power's poor dupes and victims yet have
never
Propitiated the savage fear of kings
With purest blood of noblest hearts; . . .
Whose sacred silent air owns yet no echo
Of formal blasphemies; . . .
Receive, thou young [] of Paradise,
These exiles from the old and sinful world!
(IV, 19-36).²⁸

This dream of a utopia in the west is presented as a permanent desire to found an alternative community outside the oppressive and corrupt regime, as Archy comments earlier: 'Where they think to find / A commonwealth like Gonzalo's in the play, / Gynaccococnic and *pantisocratic*' (II, 362-4, my emphasis). This reference to Shakespeare's 'Tempest' and to Southey and Coleridge's abandoned scheme of Pantisocracy places both the Commonwealth and

²⁸ Shelley's view of America seems to draw on David Hume, *History of England: from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols. (London: A. Miller and T. Cadell, 1767), for example, v, 126-8. For Shelley's other references to America in *Laon and Cythra*, and 'Ode to Liberty', 'Reform' and *Hellas*, see Cameron, *Golden Years*, p. 641, note 57.

Pantiscocracy in the context of perennial desire for a utopia and shows Shelley's consistent attempt to awaken his predecessors to their now forsaken youthful idealism.

The masque within the play highlights Shelley's central concern with the political function of art. For the Queen, Italian music offers her shelter from political turmoil: the function of art is escapist. For the youth, art works in collaboration with the ruling power (Scrivener, p. 302). But for the older citizens, the masque offers an opportunity to comment on social issues and to rally support for change. The second citizen sees the antimasque as an implicit prophecy of revenge. The prophecy is conveyed in a poetic mode of sudden revelation amounting to apocalypse, a mode reminiscent of the 'ancestral voices prophesying wars', which threaten the construction of the 'pleasure-dome' in Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' (l. 30).²⁹ In Coleridge's poem, the supremacy of the imagination remains all the more precious because the splendour of the dome is doomed to be dissolved by the poet's awakening to the historical fact that it is the dome of a tyrant. The 'rare device' (l. 35) of the dome floating upon the waves thus embodies, in Jerome McGann's view, the Romantic ideology of poetry.³⁰ Coleridge builds for himself a safe haven in poetry; however, he remains conscious of the deceptive nature of such a construct. By contrast, Shelley in 'Charles the First', is determined to subject the construct to historical investigation. By exposing the ideological deployments of art, Shelley seeks to wrench it to the service of true Liberty.

The historical insights of the second citizen are echoed by Archy, who is in some sense a poet, but a poet who offers his insights within the court. His 'urbane sarcasm' (Johnston, p. 86) are tolerated in the court paradoxically because he is regarded as insane. The King is receptive to the truths implied in

²⁹ Quotations from Coleridge's poems are from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed., E. H. Coleridge (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1912).

³⁰ Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: U of Chicago: 1982), pp. 98-102.

Archy's jests, for he sees that Archy 'weaves about himself a world of mirth / Out of the wreck of ours' (II, 109-10). Archy prophesies destruction if the government is given over to the 'knaves'. He envisages the future as a procession to Bedlam (II, 61), recalling the procession of the masque, which is described by the youth as a Roman triumphal pageant to the Capitolian (I, 144). His piercing insight remains *within* the court, yet remains there unheeded. His is the vigilant conscience amid the flux of historical events, but a seemingly powerless one. He therefore embodies the Shelleyan poet in its most paradoxical mode, who forever occupies the purgatorial position between heaven and hell, and whose determination to utter truth is in proportion to the falsifying power of the institutions from within which he speaks. Archy's position, independent of both royalists and puritans, also indicates Shelley's profoundly non-partisan stance.

Shelley's double use of natural imagery shows his insight into the institutionalised process of interpretation. In the debate of the 1790s, the analogy drawn from natural succession was employed by both Tom Paine and Edmund Burke to support their contrary ideas of legitimate political succession. The natural imagery in Shelley's drama is skilfully employed to reveal the conflicting forces of interpretation and appropriation. His difficulties in continuing with this play might be accounted for, as Kucich suggests, by his keen awareness that he cannot situate the failed revolution of the seventeenth century within an 'integrated continuum of historical improvement' (Kucich, *Inventing*, p. 142). But his concern with the function of poetry in the process of historical investigation and interpretation is clearly presented. By revealing the contending ideological forces in the interpretation of history, Shelley demonstrates the impartial role of the poet responsive to the plight of his fellow citizens on both sides of the crisis.

Let us follow the corpse of British Liberty slowly and reverentially to its tomb; and if some glorious Phantom should appear and make its throne of broken swords and sceptres and royal crowns trampled in the dust, let us say that the Spirit of Liberty has arisen from its grave and left all that was gross and mortal there, and kneel down and worship it as our Queen.
 'An Address to the People On the Death of the Princess Charlotte'
 (Murray, *Prose*, p. 239)³¹

'The Masque of Anarchy' (hereafter 'The Masque') may be regarded as an allegorical parody of the history play. It presents Shelley's immediate response to the Peterloo massacre (16 August, 1819). Together with the unfinished pamphlet, 'A Philosophical View of Reform', 'The Masque' manifests Shelley's concern to address both the enlightened few and the lower social orders at a time of political crisis. 'The Masque' addresses a readership that has been educated by popular journalism, such as William Cobbett's *Political Register*. This targeted audience requires him to utilise the style of the broad sheet ballad, a style charged with social protest which he had experimented with in the early days of his Irish campaign (1812). But here in 'The Masque', the stylistic manoeuvring is more complicated for Shelley plays with two contradictory genres at the same time, the ballad and the masque, in order to exhort the under-privileged to adopt a strategy of passive resistance, and to deplore the ruthlessness of the government (Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, p. 55). As a poem depending heavily on the mode of allegory and radical use of established genres, 'The Masque', foregrounds the process of interpretation and therefore highlights the function of poetry at a time of social crisis.³²

Shelley had employed the style of the broad sheet ballad during his early campaign for Catholic emancipation in Ireland, in poems such as 'A Tale of Society as it is: from facts, 1811', and 'The Devil's Walk'. But he gave up this style for a refined one more appropriate to his gentlemanly education and the

³¹ This is a pamphlet written on 11 and 12 November, 1817, four months before Shelley's departure for Italy.

³² The Peterloo massacre offered an occasion for rival interpretations, whose differences derived from their various political perspectives. As Philip Lawson notes, Peterloo played a unique role as a 'test case' for historiographical methods. See Philip Lawson, 'Reasoning Peterloo', *History Today*, 38 (March 1988), pp. 24-9.

audience whom he was trying to address. Literary style necessarily involves a political gesture, for style is a hallmark of class, as Byron recognised.³³

Shelley, by adopting the style of broad sheet ballad, makes explicit his understanding of the gravity of the political crisis and his wish to offer his sympathy and advice to the unjustly oppressed lower class.

Shelley's solidarity with the common people is also dramatised in his liberal use of the masque genre, which is best exemplified in the interaction of contrarities within the masque itself, that is, between the masque (which I define as the troop of Anarchy, stanzas i--xvii) and the antimasque (the figures of Hope and Time, stanzas xxii--xci).³⁴ Above all, the title that Shelley finally settled on, 'The Masque of Anarchy', as Kenneth Cameron notes,³⁵ sums up the ambiguities of meaning in the poem. First, it indicates Shelley's satirical use of the courtly masque, which turns out to be a 'ghastly masquerade' (l. 27) of Anarchy. Second, it foregrounds the working of the central metaphor, a mask as a disguise assumed by the oppressors. Shelley attempts to unveil the disguise of hypocrisy through a radical reworking of the courtly genre which functions to liberate the power of interpretation from both oppressors and the oppressed.

Shelley's renovations of the courtly masque is modelled on Leigh Hunt's masque, 'The Descent of Liberty',³⁶ and also draws on the kind of masque popularised in radical literature. Shelley not only explores the richly allegorical quality of the masque but inverts the hierarchical structure implied in this 'elite' genre (Vargo, p. 50). In the genre as established by Ben Jonson,

³³ Byron wrote to Hobhouse, attacking him for having reconciled himself with Cobbett and Henry Hunt: 'why our classical education alone . . . should teach us to trample on such unredeemed dirt'. Byron's letter to Hobhouse (22 April, 1820), *Byron's Letters and Journals*, 12 vols., ed., Leslie A. Marchand, (London: John Murray, 1973-82), vii, 81.

³⁴ The discussion of the masque genre is indebted to Lisa Vargo, 'Unmasking Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy"', *English Studies in Canada*, 13 (March 1987), pp. 49-64.

³⁵ See Shelley's letter to Hunt (14-18 Nov., 1819), Jones, ii, 152; Hunt's note to his edition of the poem in 1832, and Mary's edition of *Posthumous Poems* (1839). Also see Cameron, *Golden Years*, p. 346.

³⁶ Curran, *Annus*, p. 189. Shelley's interest in the genre of the masque was partly influenced by Italian operas, see Vargo, p. 62, note 2.

the masque is performed by members from the court, while the antimasque is performed by professional actors and actresses. The masque represents order and the antimasque disorder, which eventually, often after a divine intervention, submits to the harmonious power embodied in the masquers. The performance revolves around the king, with the masque eulogising his achievement and the antimasque serving as a gentle warning to him not to neglect his royal duty.³⁷ Shelley subverts the established hierarchy first by showing that the masque represents the rule of anarchy and second by having the masque dispersed by the antimasque.

Shelley capsize the Jonsonian hierarchy to expose the counter-hegemonic and self-destructive potential implicit in the masque. Shelley substitutes for the conventional 'triumph of monarchy' 'triumph of Anarchy' (l. 57), an aggressive re-definition of terms, which expresses Shelley's belief that it is not popular demonstrations but their violent suppression that threatens to plunge the nation into anarchy.³⁸ The opposition between monarchy and anarchy, between the ruler and the ruled, also functions as the darkest possible version of Bakhtinian carnival, whose counter-hegemonic force derives from its egalitarian nature. But 'The Masque' remains a double-edged warning to the people and the ruling class alike. As Shelley judged from the accumulated tensions in the English society before the Peterloo massacre: 'the change should commence among the higher orders, or anarchy will only be the last flash before despotism' (See Shelley's letter to Peacock, 24 September, 1819, Jones, ii, 114-5). But, for Shelley, the people in general are also partly responsible for their plight. The multitude in 'The Masque' is described as 'adoring' (l. 41), 'prostrate' (l. 126) and then 'trampled' (l. 222). The self-

³⁷ Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1965), pp. 10, 34-5, 198.

³⁸ Steven E. Jones regards 'The Masque' as Shelley's practice of a Juvenalian satire, whose authority is firmly based on moral indignation. As a satire, 'The Masque' offers a 'self-reflexive' record of barbarism. For detailed discussion of the satire and the violence that it implies, see Jones, *Satire*, pp. 94-124, quotations are from pp. 4, 9.

destructive quality of the Brahminic procession described in *Queen Mab* (V, 93-102; VII, 34-6) is recalled here to upset the balanced antagonism between master and slave. It indicates Shelley's attempt to awaken the people to the recognition that monarchy is sustained by people who blindly bow to its false glamour.

A woman intervenes between the 'mighty troop' of Anarchy and the multitude, who is identified as 'Hope' but disguised as 'Despair' (xxii). She is modelled on an actual woman, Elizabeth Farren, whose baby in her arms was the first victim in the massacre, a story much utilised to show the senseless cruelty of the Manchester militia.³⁹ She is also linked with the female figures who were commonly used in the 1790s as the vehicle of social protest, such as Southey and Coleridge's 'Joan of Arc', and Wordsworth's 'A Female Vagrant', and Margaret in *The Excursion*. In Shelley's earlier poems, he sometimes made use of similar figures, such as the bereaved mother in 'A Tale of Society as it is: from facts; 1811', or the pestilence-stricken woman, in *Laon and Cythna* (VI, xlviii-lviii).⁴⁰ The woman thus exemplifies Shelley's deployment of popular iconography. Radical magazines, like William Hone's *The Political Showman*, helped to popularise pictures of the ruling orders, the printing press and the oppressed public.⁴¹ Such popular iconography depicts social unrest as a symptom of a general natural disorder, which is essentially caused by the ruling class abusing their parental obligations towards the people. It expresses the common indignation that unites the radical magazines, populist and genteel alike.⁴²

³⁹ See *The Examiner*, no. 19 (19 September, 1819), p. 597.

⁴⁰ In *Queen Mab* (VII, 1-13), Shelley uses a woman holding her child at the public execution of an atheist as a device of protest.

⁴¹ Karl Kroeber notes that the imagery of 'The Masque' is largely drawn from popular iconography, cited in Curran, *Annus*, p. 238, note, 3. For the prevalence of the masque in popular literature, best exemplified in Thomas Woller's *The Black Dwarf* (25 August, 1819), see Vargo, p. 55. The discussion of popular iconography is indebted to Scrivener, pp. 199-207, see also Jones, *Satire*, pp. 94-123.

⁴² In an open letter in *The Examiner* responding to the Peterloo massacre, Sir Frances Burdett also employs the imagery of perverted familial relationship to depict the 'tyrants' as ever eager to 'rip open their mother's womb'. See Cameron, *Golden Years*, p. 626, note.

Shelley's Hope carries out a task which her old father has failed to achieve: 'My father Time is weak and gray / With waiting for a better day; / See how idiot-like he stands / Fumbling with his palsied hands!' (ll. 90-4). By lying down in front of the horsemen, she paradoxically repudiates her father's passivity but takes up an equally passive stance of resistance. She in fact implements what Shelley promotes in 'Reform', a passive resistance which is represented as more effective than aggressive defence. Her action ushers in the divine intervention: an image arrives to repel the troop of Anarchy. This image enacts Shelley's idea of a conscientious demagogue, whose mastery over language is placed in the service of Liberty. The image wields the power of the 'spiritus mundi' (Scrivener, p. 206) to dispel evils and to herald a political spring. But first of all, it awakens the people to an understanding of their predicament.

The image exerts an allegorical power, which shows Shelley's awareness of the 'mythologizing' nature of the contention between the two incompatible ideologies (Jones, *Satire*, p. 96). The image emerges from the mist like a spirit of the gentle spring (ll. 122-5) then grows into a Shape 'arrayed in mail', on whose helm lies a planet (ll. 110, 114-5). The coming into shape of the image is described in terms of an optical effect, 'A mist, a light, an image rose, / Small at first, and weak, and frail / Like the vapour of a vale' (ll. 103-5), which exemplifies the transforming and 'unmasking' power of the image.⁴³ The image utters words in a voice like the mother earth:

As if their Own indignant Earth
Which gave the sons of England birth
Had felt their blood upon her brow,
And shuddering with a mother's throe

Had turned every drop of blood
By which her face had been bedewed

8.

⁴³ Jones suggests the configuration of the image might be based on an analogy with the popular contemporary device of transparency, which superimposed layers of visions and caused some to stand out, and which manipulated the psychology of perception (Jones, *Satire*, pp. 112-3).

To an accent unwithstood,--
As if her heart had cried aloud: . . . (ll. 139-146).

The indignant maternal spirit of the nation, seeing her children violated, as it were, by their own bad father, now calls on them to resist. The initial gentleness gains an invincible edge which suggests the ultimate triumph of Britannia, whose staff of Liberty, as often shown in popular literature, is also a spear.

The sermon delivered by the image demonstrates how language is emancipated from an ossifying tyranny in order to serve the cause of Liberty. Up to this point of the poem, the language of tyranny, the language that confines its exponents within the sterile master-slave antagonism, has been countered by the language of Hope alone.⁴⁴ But it is the language of the image that articulates, and enables the people to articulate, their hitherto 'untold' woes (l. 291). The image wields a power best explained by its association with the emancipated and emancipating force of the feminine.⁴⁵ It addresses the Men of England above all as the 'heirs of Glory', as the 'Heroes of unwritten story' (ll. 147-8). It registers an explicit intent to situate the Peterloo massacre as one episode in the long triumphant progress of Liberty, a progress which had reached a high point in the seventeenth-century Commonwealth. The image exhorts the people with a prophetic urgency and persistence akin to that of Isaiah (51: 9; 52: 2) to wake from their plight. Their rights as citizens, established by the 'old laws of England' (l. 331), have been usurped by the despotic regime. These laws are seen as in accord with the laws of nature. The usurpation and violation of either only bring about disaster and disorder. By resorting to the constitutional discourse of nature popularised by Tom Paine

⁴⁴ The ideological implications of the three kinds of language are suggested by Steven Richard Goldsmith, 'Unbuilding Jerusalem: The Romantics Against the Apocalypse' (doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1986), pp. 328-33.

⁴⁵ Anne Janowitz, "A Voice from across the Sea": Communitarianism at the Limits of Romanticism', Mary A. Favret, and Nicola J. Watson, ed., *At the Limits of Romanticism: Essays in Cultural, Feminist and Materialist Criticism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994), pp. 83-100, p. 96.

and his radical followers, Shelley attempts to legitimise his call for extra-parliamentary gatherings (Jones, 'Succession', p. 148).

'Let a great Assembly be
Of the fearless and the free
On some spot of English ground
Where the plains stretch wide around.

Let the blue sky overhead,
The green earth on which ye tread,
All that must eternal be
Witness the solemnity (ll. 262-9).

This assembly represents the people, whose inviolable rights are authorised by nature, but who have been refused parliamentary representation. The image twice encourages them to rise in defence of their rights even menacingly by displaying the overwhelming superiority of their numbers:

'Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to Earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you-
Ye are many--they are few
(ll. 151-5, 368-372).

The ending of the poem reveals the true nature of this satire as bipartite in intention, like the conventional Roman formal verse satire designed both to satirise and to exhort (Jones, *Satire*, p. 105). However, the exhortation of a mass-meeting runs the risk of encouraging a 'collective self-sacrifice' which would 'perpetuate' the violence that it aims to upset (Jones, *Satire*, pp. 100-1), while the speaker of the poem remains ambiguously detached from either party.

As an immediate response to the Peterloo massacre, 'The Masque' demonstrates Shelley's anxiety to reach beyond his earlier political education in elitist Godwinian philosophy, and also beyond most of the populist leaders of his time. By addressing the people in a language familiar to them, Shelley shows a mature political insight in overcoming his earlier ambivalence towards

the poor (Scrivener, p. 210). The image thus represents a positive model of the conscientious demagogue in contrast to William Cobbett.⁴⁶ Shelley not only promotes a more just representation in Parliament, but also seeks to educate the labourers that the essence of Liberty is actually exemplified in a simple dignified family life. But this somewhat patronising tone in depicting an 'agrarian utopia' (Janowitz, p. 90) nevertheless shows Shelley's limitations as a radical aristocrat.

The poem is preoccupied with a need to articulate the 'untold' woes of the people, a need deeply felt by a Shelley who is himself alienated from the people to whom he wishes to appeal. In a letter to Ollier immediately after the news of Peterloo massacre reached him (6 September, 1819, Jones, ii, 117), he quoted from 'The Cenci': 'Something must be done--what yet I know not . . . ' (III, i, 86-7). The sense of impotent outrage that overpowered Shelley is vividly associated for him with the injustice suffered by Beatrice Cenci. Beatrice is portrayed in close association with Antigone, the victim of oppressive patriarchy and established religion (Rossington, "'The Cenci'", p. 139). As Beatrice tells her step-mother:

What are the words which you would have me
 speak?
 I, who can feign no image in my mind
 Of that which has transformed me: I, whose
 thought
 Is like a ghost shrouded and folded up
 In its own formless horror: of all words,
 That minister to mortal intercourse,
 Which wouldst thou hear? For there is none to
 tell
 My misery: . . . (III, i, 107-114).

⁴⁶ In a note to *Peter Bell the Third*, Shelley accuses both the ruling orders and the populist demagogues of conspiring against the peace of the nation. In *Peter Bell the Third*, Shelley is eager to distinguish himself from Wordsworth, the courtly poet, and William Cobbett, the populist, in order to, as in Cronin's words, maintain an 'even-handed distance from either extreme'. Richard Cronin, "Peter Bell", "Peterloo", and the Politics of Cockney Poetry', *Essays and Studies* (1991), pp. 63-87, p. 82.

Beatrice suffers an unutterable pang, and its 'unutterability' is constitutive of the overpowering patriarchal institution.⁴⁷ She represents not just a psychological case study, but rather a study of the psychological effect of revolution. The moral 'casuistry' (the Preface to 'The Cenci', Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 276) of Beatrice, as Michael Rossington suggests, lies not in her parricide but in her subsequent self-delusion and wilful manipulation of the people around her after the murder (Rossington, "'The Cenci'", p. 149). Beatrice's failure to escape from the sterile cycle that can meet violence only with violence questions the validity of the political lesson expressed in 'The Masque'. Beatrice's conduct and the moral ambiguity that it leads to might suggest that the tactic of 'passive resistance' that Shelley advocates in the 'Reform' and 'The Masque' is not easily sustainable in reality (Rossington, "'The Cenci'", p. 141).

Stuart Curran praises 'The Masque' as basing its 'allegorical and oratorical simplicities upon the complex manipulation of generic conventions and semantic ambiguities' (Curran, *Annus*, p. 187). Shelley 'validates', in Vargo's words (p. 56), popular radical literature while at the same time distancing himself from the servile acquiescence which he sees represented by the 'courtly poet', Wordsworth. But 'The Masque' is not simply an egalitarian text.⁴⁸ The fact that Shelley sent this poem to Hunt to be published in *The Examiner* might indicate his lack of access to the popular radical magazines but might equally betray Shelley's hesitation to directly instigate the people to rebel against authority. The discrepancy between the 'implied reader' in the poem, the general public, and the actual reader, the enlightened few who read *The Examiner*, might reveal Shelley's painful isolation from the readers to whom he endeavours to appeal. It might as well suggest Shelley's belief in his own

⁴⁷ Timothy Webb, 'Naming "I-t": Incest and Outrage in Shelley', *Romantic Reassessment* (112), *Shelley 1792-1992*, ed., James Hogg (Salzburg: Institut Fur Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1993), pp. 186-204, p. 201.

⁴⁸ Donald H. Reiman, *Romantic Texts and Contexts* (Columbia: Missouri UP, 1987), p. 271.

manoeuvring of style, a manifestation of interpretive freedom, as a herald of general emancipation. At a time of mounting social crisis, 'The Masque', as a poetic enactment of his ideas in the 'Reform', asserts the power of poetry to 'reclaim' the right to interpret historical events, but it also dramatises a sense of powerlessness in the face of overwhelming oppression. To recognise one's own impotence is no more than the first step towards justice.

IV. Reading of History

Shelley developed his theory of history in response to the pressing need to place the political crisis of his time in a historical perspective. His historical investigation may take the forms of prose essays and impassioned broad-sheet ballads, epic romance and drama. The various literary modes not only demonstrate his strategy of choosing a particular style and genre to appeal to a specific audience, but also reflect Shelley's desire to subject his theory of history to continuous modification. 'Reform', 'Charles the First' and 'The Masque', which concentrate on the trope of pageant, show him investigating the process of history-making and attempting to restore the power of interpretation to the people. *Laon and Cythna*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Hellas* represent his attempt to illustrate his historical view by an act of reading. Scenes of reading are incorporated in these works as tentative models of the relationship between the text and the reader. In *Laon and Cythna*, the scenes of reading are organised so that the ideal 'implied reader' is progressively re-modelled until he is eventually identified with the historically explicit reader. The model of reading in the poem remains problematic because it fails to create an alternative to the rival discourses of the tyrant and of the populist. The problematic nature of this model reveals and also helps to explain the enigmatic conclusion of the poem. The poem presents itself as an act of reading, a reading of history as a phenomenological event which reviews

the past in terms of the present. The problematic element in the model of reading in *Laon and Cythna* is temporarily suspended in *Prometheus Unbound*. The lyrical drama examines the development of human history in a cosmic context. The two visions presented to the Titan by the Furies and by the Spirits are actually drawn from episodes of human history. The latter vision is not sufficient to expunge the despair caused by the former, but it enables the repentant Titan to recognise love as the true dominant force in the universe. A vision of a regenerate world is presented through poetic and scientific models which explain the operation of the universe in parallel with the working of human history. The fourth act enacts this knowledge in the form of a nuptial masque, a masque which functions in direct contrast to those in 'Charles the First' and 'The Masque of Anarchy'. At last, Demogorgon appears to restore the apocalyptic impulse, and hence to preserve a vision of the future characterised by the energy of perpetual renewal. Art serves as its inexhaustible fountain and unfailing safeguard. This notion that wisdom can only be gained from an unflinching examination of the traumatic past is enacted again in *Hellas*. The play thematises the cyclic repetitions of history by modelling itself on Aeschylus's play, 'The Persians', and thus strenuously promotes a renewal of the spirit of Liberty which once found incarnation in Athens. The play explores the conclusions of *Prometheus Unbound* in their psychological effects. First, art is shown as a liberating force within society precisely because it does not seek to construct a realm that transcends historical concerns and contingencies. Second, the indeterminacy of history that *Prometheus Unbound* presents as the ultimate knowledge of history is seen as a source both of agony and of hope, which are experienced by both sides in the struggle for domination. Knowledge of the operation of the universe and of human history, portrayed according to a scientific model in *Prometheus Unbound*, is embodied in the figure of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, whose wisdom is gained at the price of eternal suffering. He is not a titanic figure,

like Prometheus, able to transcend mortality. Instead, Ahasuerus remains forever entangled in human history and yet gleans insights from this entanglement. He thus represents the position that recurs in Shelley's late works, as in 'The Masque', and 'Charles the First'.

The model of reading on which the investigation of *Laon and Cythna* will be based is drawn from reader-response theory, principally the theories of Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish, and the semiotic study of the role of the reader by Umberto Eco. Iser in *The Implied Reader* emphasises the convergence of the text (the actual linguistic product held in the reader's hand) and the work (the actualisation of the meaning of the text by the reader). The convergence remains 'virtual'. The virtuality identifies the process of reading as the 'precondition' for the effects that the work calls forth (p. 275). The term, 'implied reader', is constructed to incorporate both the 'prestructuring' of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's 'actualisation' of this potential through the reading process (p. xii).⁴⁹ Reading unfolds itself as a discovery of the self and the world and also reveals itself as an operation in the realm of the consciousness (pp. 291, 293). Since reading is a work of the consciousness, due to the nature of consciousness and perception, it is in a state of continuous modification (p. 279). Reading resulting from a particular perspective and from a particular temporal-spatial co-ordinate does not determine but contributes to the meaning of the text as a whole. Iser's emphasis on the reader as co-author, and on reading as an event gives Stanley Fish the foundation he needs to attack the New Critical emphasis on the objectivity of the text, and to focus instead on the effects of the text on the reader. He regards the reader as an 'active mediating presence' in the text.⁵⁰ He later sees that the interpretive

⁴⁹ The 'implied reader' refers to the active function and operation of the reading process designed by the author, and should be distinguished from H. R. Jauss's notion of the 'explicit reader', which is the historically differentiated reader that the text actually addresses. See H. R. Jauss, 'Theses on the Transition from the Aesthetics of Literary Works to a Theory of Aesthetic Experience', *Interpretation of Narrative*, ed., Mario J. Valdes and Owen J. Miller (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1978), pp. 137-47, p. 142.

⁵⁰ Stanley Fish, 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', rpt. in *Reader-Response*

strategies employed by the reader are mutually interdependent with the formal features of the text and with the authorial intentions that the reader infers from the text.⁵¹ Iser's and Fish's emphases on the role of the reader and the reading process have affinities with Eco's view of the text as 'open' in so far as it incorporates the reader's interpretation as a structural element in its own generative process.⁵² An open text posits its own Model Reader within its textual structure (Eco, p. 9).⁵³ The following section considers *Laon and Cythna* to be an example of an open text, which incorporates the reader within its structure by positing a model of reading which in the end problematises the conclusions that both the text and the reading model lay claim to.⁵⁴

As a work directly engaging with the legacy of the French Revolution, *Laon and Cythna* presents itself as a double test, first as an 'experiment on the temper of the public mind, as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives, among the enlightened and refined' and second as a test of Shelley's own poetic prowess to 'awaken the feelings', so that the reader will see the 'beauty of true virtue' (Preface, Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 32). The poem uses the revolt against the Ottoman empire as an example to illustrate the general course of history, in which a 'reflux' will eventually bear the 'shipwrecked hopes of men' into a 'secure haven' after a storm, a 'partial glimpse' of which led to a 'gloom and misanthropy' that was epidemic among the English radicals after the French Revolution (pp. 33-4). The poem is

Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralisms, ed., Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore and London: the Johns Hopkins UP, 1980), pp. 70-100, p. 70.

⁵¹ Stanley Fish, 'Interpreting the "Variorum"', *Critical Inquiry*, 2 (Spring 1976), 465-85, rpt. in Tompkins, pp. 164-84.

⁵² Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p. 3.

⁵³ Eco refers the idea of a Model Reader to Roland Barthes, 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits', *Communications* 8 (1966) and Michael Riffatère, *Essais de stylistique structurale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1971).

⁵⁴ The idea of 'scene of reading' is indebted to Tilottama Rajan, who focuses her study of Romantic literature on the scenes of reading (and writing) while expanding the focus of inquiry from the 'figural moment' of the trope of reading as a reflection on the nature of language itself, which is a view maintained by De Man and Hillis Miller, to the entire process of communication (*Supplement*, pp. 10-11).

aimed at the enlightened reader, an audience familiar with Southey's epic style and Byron's eastern tales. It represents Shelley's effort to break through the oppressive censorship imposed on writers at the time and to reach a popular audience.⁵⁵ Shelley incorporates a model relationship between the text and its reader into the fabric of the poem to suggest ways of approaching the poem and ways of emerging from despair. The first canto establishes the relationship between the Woman and the dead poet as an adumbration of the basic pattern of reception according to which Laon's revolutionary ideas are to be received. The reception of Laon's teaching by Cythna, the Old Hermit and the people in the Golden City, and the reception of Cythna's speech by the Mariners serve as examples of how *Laon and Cythna* might be read. However, the model of reading becomes, in Rajan's terms (*Supplement*, p. 320), 'problematic' when the two discourses, the revolutionary poetry of Laon and the 'secret steel' of Othman engage in a struggle with each other for the dominance of the people in the Golden City and the latter brutally overpowers the former. The poem claims to foster an optimism which is substantiated neither by the poem's plot, in which Laon and Cythna fail, nor by its Dedication, which imagines a similar failure for Shelley and Mary, nor by the scanty sale which the published poem achieved. The duty of hope is nevertheless enforced by the process of reading, which transposes the lesson of history from the author to the reader. By incorporating and enacting the process of reading, the poem redeems its claim to distinguish the duty to hope from both escapist transcendentalism and passive acquiescence. The model of reading gives an organising shape to the disunited epic, the three climaxes correspond to three ways of reading: a revolutionary reading, which reaches its climax at the tyrant's fall (Canto V); an erotic reading, which climaxes when Laon and Cythna consummate their love (Canto VI); a transcendental reading, which climaxes in the Temple of the

⁵⁵ For the censorship activities that affected Shelley and the other radical writers, see Kenneth Neill Cameron, *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 156-79.

Spirit (Canto XII). In this way, the process of reading is thematised as a mode of historical investigation.

This model of reading reveals Shelley's Enlightenment belief in the emancipating power of knowledge. The French Revolution failed because of a 'defect of correspondence between the knowledge existing in society and the improvement or gradual abolition of political institutions', and his poem represents his contribution to the 'resolute perseverance and indefatigable hope' which the triumph of Liberty requires (Preface, Matthews, *Shelley*, pp. 33-4). The dissemination of knowledge, in the society of Laon and Cythna, is controlled by an oppressive regime, as it was in Shelley's England, for oppressive government depends on the ignorance of its people. The poem 'dramatises', in Kyle Grimes's terms, the danger that radical writers faced when they challenged the governmental attempt to secure a monopoly of discourse.⁵⁶ Shelley stages the scenes of reading, most explicitly in Cythna's conversion of the mariners and in Laon's attempt to supplant the discourse of Ottoman and thus gain control over the people of the Golden City, in order to alert the reader to the critical response that his poem invites. The violence that Laon's and Cythna's language provokes cannot be absolved by their martyrdom, which is only a culmination of their 'idolatry of self', a guilt that all idealist revolutionaries find inescapable.⁵⁷ Only through a reading based on the transposition of readers, which is the organising principle of the poem, can the poem be redeemed from the logic of violence and the doctrine of transcendentalism.

A positive model of reading is set by Cythna's speech to the mariners who rescue her from the tyrant's cave, a speech recounted to Laon in Cantos VIII

⁵⁶ Kyle Grimes, 'Censorship, Violence, and Political Rhetoric: *The Revolt of Islam* in Its Time', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 43 (1994), pp. 98-116, p. 110.

⁵⁷ The martyrdom is the logical conclusion of a sequence, or a chain, of violence as Cythna on the pyre expresses her inability to break the 'chain' that has been woven by herself (IX, xxxiii). Donna Richardson points out that martyrdom reveals that the revolution is propelled by egocentred idealism, see "'Dark Idolatry'", pp. 73-98.

and IX. Cythna, having learned the lesson of Liberty from Laon since their childhood, advocates Laon's cause in his absence. Cythna enlightens the mariners with the knowledge of their own selves and the illusory nature of the external powers which they have created themselves. Religion, monarchy, customs and opinions, all the dominating forces in an oppressive society, are but 'mirrors' of the same mind-forged manacles (*l.* 3374). They could be free from both external tyranny and from the tyranny within their own heart. As Cythna exhorts the mariners:

'Disguise it not--we have one human heart--
All mortal thoughts confess a common home;
Blush not for what may to thyself impart
Stains of inevitable crime: . . .'

'Reproach not thine own soul, but know thyself
Nor hate another's crime, nor loath thine own.
It is the dark idolatry of self,

...
The past is Death's, the future is thine own;
... '(VIII, xix, xxii).

Cythna's speech makes its way to the heart of the mariners, as a youth exclaims:

no human bosom can withstand
Thee, wondrous Lady, and the mild command
Of thy keen eyes:--yes, we are wretched slaves
(VIII, xxiv).

On arriving at the Golden City, a feast is held in honour of the name of Laon, which has become equivalent to Liberty (IX, iii). Their newly won freedom makes them enthusiastic to 'cleanse the fevered world as with an earthquake's spasm' (IX, v). The 'strong speech' of Cythna continues to penetrate people's hearts. Women especially are awakened from their 'cold, careless, willing slavery' and their freedom makes the tyrants desolate (IX, x). The power of Cythna's speech is understood as derivative from Laon's poetry and speech. The direct emotive effects of her speech have an affinity with the effects of Laon's poetry on the Woman and on the old Hermit. The Woman in

the first Canto is portrayed as a version of Cythna, an orphan nurtured with a dying poet's books (I, xxxvii), who now comes to address the dreamer. The dead poet had appeared to her in dream to direct her to a vast and peopled city, Paris, which was embroiled in a holy warfare (I, xlv). After those revolutionary hopes had lost the 'glory of their youth' (I, xlv), she returned and sought comfort from nature which seemed to her interfused with the spirit of the dead poet. The dead poet's books had functioned to inspire her revolutionary zeal and to console her at a time of despair. This is the effect that Shelley's poem is designed to achieve for the English radicals, such as Wordsworth and Southey, who have repudiated their youthful republicanism in their disappointment at the failure of the French Revolution. In the case of the old Hermit, the relevance to the older generation is more pointed. The Hermit had withdrawn from the world to a lonely cell after seeing the abjectness of humankind, but seeing Laon's heroic deeds, his spirit 'leaped' within his 'aged frame' (IV, x). He leaves his cell to spread abroad what he had learned from ancient literature and from Laon's 'aspiring' deeds. The Hermit's writings are read by men in 'secret chambers' and they open their eyes to their own state of slavery till 'every bosom thus is rapt and shook, / Like autumn's myriad leaves in one swollen mountain-brook' (IV, xiii). Their regained sense of liberty makes the tyrants tremble (IV, xiv). But the old Hermit admits to Laon, whom he rescues from the tyrant, that he has been nothing but Laon's 'passive instrument' (IV, xvi), and that Laon's name to the 'tumultuous throng / Were like the star whose beams the waves compel / And tempests, and his soul-subduing tongue / Were as a lance to quell the mailed crest of wrong' (IV, xvii). Laon succeeds in awakening the old Hermit to action. But the validity of Laon's words still needs to be tested in a direct confrontation with the tyrant's.

Laon and the tyrant confront one another when Laon in disguise returns to the Golden City to give himself up in exchange for Cythna's passage to America. Laon speaks to the people:

[']O, could I win your ears to dare be now
Glorious, and great, and calm! that ye would
cast
Into the dust those symbols of your woe,
...

If thus, 'tis well-if not, I come to say
That Laon--' while the Stranger spoke, among
The Council sudden tumult and affray
Arose, for many of those warriors young,
Had on his *eloquent accents* fed and hung
Like bees on mountain-flowers; they knew the
truth,
And from their thrones in vindication sprung;
The men of faith and law then without ruth
Drew forth their *secret steel*, and stabbed each
ardent youth.

They stabbed them in the back and sneered--a
slave
Who stood behind the throne, those corpses drew
Each to its bloody, dark, and secret grave; . . .
(XI, 4379-80, 4387-98, my emphases).

As Grimes points out, this scene of confrontation brings to a climax the recurrent opposition between poetry and tyranny (Grimes, p. 104), but it also reveals the affinity between these two mutually exclusive discourses, an affinity which reveals itself in a shared desire to dominate. From the beginning, Laon's poetry is represented in a vocabulary not dissimilar to that of the tyrant. Laon describes his verse to the dreamer:

For, before Cythna loved it, had my song
Peopled with thoughts the boundless universe,
A mighty congregation, which were strong
Where'er they trod the darkness to disperse
The cloud of that unutterable curse
Which clings upon mankind:--all things became
Slaves to my holy and heroic verse, . . .
(II, xxx, my emphasis).

The old Hermit also describes the effects of Laon's words and deeds to the people in a militant vocabulary: 'Each heart was there a shield, and every tongue / Rallied their secret hopes' (IV, x). The secret affinity of Laon's 'eloquent accents' with the tyrant's 'secret steel' is fully revealed in their confrontation at the pyre. This affinity, as Grimes remarks, represents the destructive consequence of the oppressive censorship in 1817, which foiled every possibility of a public forum wherein different ideologies could compete with each other. The underground circulation of Laon's thought via the old Hermit (IV, xiii) may reveal Shelley's private ambition for his own poetry. But Laon's poetry cannot be exempt from guilt, for it stirs the 'warriors young' to rebel, which immediately costs them their lives (Grimes, p. 111). By presenting such a rivalry, Shelley suggests that the reader should conduct a critical reading of Laon's teaching, a reading different from its appreciation by the ideal readers in the poem, namely the Woman, the Hermit and above all Cythna (Grimes, pp. 101, 111). The disastrous outcome of Laon's rivalry with the tyrant for control over the responses of the people also reflects Shelley's wariness of directly appealing to the public.⁵⁸

However, the scenes of reading staged in the poem do not seem to endorse a radically different reading from Cythna's reading of Laon's poetry, since the relationship between Cythna and Laon remains an integral part of the revolutionary ideal which is founded on a union of private and public concerns (Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, p. 102, Rossington, "'The Cenci'", p. 144). In the first canto, the dreamer is well positioned to recognise himself in the Woman: both are survivors of revolutionary defeat.

When the last hope of trampled France had
 failed
 Like a brief dream of unremaining glory,
 From visions of despair I rose, and scaled

⁵⁸ Grimes seems to have neglected the difference between the 'mass reading public', that he regards as represented by the people of the Golden City (Grimes, p. 105), and the 'enlightened and refined' reader that *Laon and Cythna* actually appeals to.

The peak of an aëreal promontory, . . . (I, 127-30).

When he meets her, the Woman demands that he hear her story (I, 343).⁵⁹ After having explained to him the mystery of the fight of an eagle and a snake and told him of her own life, she vanishes as their boat arrives at the Temple of the Spirit. The Woman's place is taken by the Spirit of Laon. Laon also remarks: 'Thou must a listener be' (I, 644), and unfolds to him the history of an ancient revolt in the Golden City. In the twelfth canto, the dreamer is transported together with Laon, Cythna and their child, to the Temple of Spirits. The poem concludes with a picture of the Temple in the midst of a lake surrounded by high mountains. The relationship between the narrators (both the Woman and Laon) and the dreamer parallels the relationship between the Ancient Mariner and the Wedding Guest, a parallel which suggests Shelley's whole poem might be understood as addressed to Coleridge. As in Coleridge's poem, Shelley's dreamer listens but is not allowed to speak. But the effect of the story on Shelley's dreamer, who wakes up from 'visions of despair', remains unknown. The silencing of the dreamer renders the poem didactic rather than dramatic. But the silence of the dreamer, read with the disappearance of the Woman, suggests a strategy which opens the text to the reader outside the poem. The story concludes only to initiate another reading.

In this first serious appeal to the Public (Preface, Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 36), Shelley speaks to the 'enlightened and refined' readers familiar with the works such as Southey's *Joan of Arc* (1796), examples of 'epic journalism', works addressing contemporary events veiled in epic stories (Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, pp. 95-6). Shelley's attempt is to institute debate by means of which the endemic 'gloom and misanthropy' of his age might be redressed. Shelley's publisher, Ollier, objected to the atheism of the poem, and the references to

⁵⁹ For a discussion of the relationship between the male dreamer and the Woman narrator and its relevance to the understanding of the poem as a whole, see Marlon B. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), p. 130.

incest, and Shelley reluctantly agreed to remove the offending passages.⁶⁰ Shelley's submission to the pressure of censorship is only explainable by his wish to reach a popular audience. But the removal of the incest issue diminishes the iconoclastic power of the poem.⁶¹ Even so, the poem still did not sell well. Nevertheless, this poem remains important in its insistence on an unflinching recognition of the traumas of the past, and in its insistence, evident in the scenes of reading that the poem includes, that the crucial question about the past is not what happened, but how what happened should be understood. He moves the subject matter of history from events to their interpretation in an attempt to locate a discourse of Liberty which can avoid the dangers of egocentric idealism and escapist transcendentalism.

⁶⁰ For a detailed discussion of the revision of *Laon and Cythna*, see Holmes, pp. 390-2, and John Donovan, 'Incest in *Laon and Cythna*: Nature, Custom, Desire', *Keats-Shelley Review*, No. 2 (Autumn 1987), 49-90..

⁶¹ Donna Richardson sees sibling incest in *Laon and Cythna* as a positive epitome of the relationship between self and other in sharp contrast to the father-daughter incest in 'The Cenci', see Richardson, p. 91, note. For a discussion of the subversive purpose of the incest theme in *Laon and Cythna*, see Donovan's article, for its function in Shelley's work in general, see Webb, 'Naming I-t'.

Prometheus Unbound enacts the discovery made in *Laon and Cythna*: history is re-envisioned by being re-read. The dramatic structure of the play thematises the reading of history as an occasion that invites the reader's participation. At the same time, the shifting modes of perception facilitated by the form of drama help to define Shelley's view of history as a constant renewing of potentiality. This insight is revealed in two stages. First, the antagonism that governs the old world needs to be repudiated through a 'reconciliation' with the past (Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, p. 134), a past which in *Prometheus Unbound* is both literary and political. This reconciliation leads to a full understanding of the self as the agent of change. Although in *Prometheus Unbound* the outcome of change is still envisaged in terms of a phoenix-like dethronement and rebirth, the rhetoric of revolution eventually results in the freedom of self-rule. The inward turning of events transforms political revolution into an entirely immanent apocalypse. But the apocalyptic impulse, instead of building a transcendental realm where all strivings are arrested, is harnessed to confront actual historical events. The play ends in a vision of freedom which is at once the product of full self-knowledge, and full knowledge of the world and its history. The dynamism of such a regenerate universe is maintained by an art which never rests within limits but forever transgresses boundaries. Nevertheless, this interiorisation of apocalypse reflects Shelley's sense of powerlessness at a time when reactionary forces seemed triumphant.

The play begins in a fallen world. The only hope for regeneration depends upon the revocation of Prometheus's curse. Prometheus asks the Earth Mother to help him to 'recall' (I, 59) the curse that he had imposed on Jupiter. The curse has become a 'treasured spell' (I, 184) which holds the key to the Titan's self-reintegration and on which the well-being of the entire universe hinges. It is associated with another 'treasured' spell reserved in the realm of Demogorgon, to which Asia alone holds the key (II, iii, 88). To 'recall' the

curse is at once to bring it back to memory and to annul it. The Earth Mother conjures up the phantasm of Jupiter to repeat the forgotten curse. That Jupiter's phantasm is invoked to rehearse Prometheus's curse on Jupiter functions as a double-edged irony. On the one hand, Jupiter's phantasm is used to curse Jupiter. It suggests that Jupiter is nothing but a 'dark shadow' of Prometheus (Wasserman, 258). On the other, Prometheus cannot fail to recognise in the 'gestures proud and cold / And looks of firm defiance' (I, 259-60) assumed by the phantasm his own 'eyeless' hatred (I, 9). It is their mutual defiance that binds Jupiter and Prometheus together in a 'seal of identity'.⁶² Prometheus has to recognise the antagonism which has impelled him to externalise the evil within himself as Jupiter and thus to enthrone him as the 'sceptred curse' (IV, 398). He realises that his own revenge is as 'vain' as that of Jupiter (I, 11). The repeated curse highlights the self-division of Prometheus, which demands a 'reintegration', as Stuart Sperry notes.⁶³ It is the grace of forgiveness that triggers his reintegration with himself: 'It doth repent me: . . . I wish no living thing to suffer pain' (I, 303-5). By such a revocation, Prometheus shows his determination not to compromise with the evil that is imposed on him, like the Maniac in 'Julian and Maddalo', nor to be possessed by it like Beatrice in 'The Cenci' (Levinson, *Fragment Poem*, p.155). Only a reintegrated self can turn his present plight into a potential purgatory, which will lead to ultimate redemption.

After coming to terms with his personal history, Prometheus is confronted with a vision of the collective past, a history which has resulted from his 'kindling' a thirst in mankind. The visions are conjured up by the Furies as a torment to the 'unrepented' Titan, for he refuses to accept the intercession of Mercury. The Furies assemble in legions from the deep (I, 462) to torment the

⁶² Stuart Curran, 'The Siege of Hateful Contraries: Shelley, Mary Shelley, Byron, and *Paradise Lost*', *Milton and the Line of Vision*, ed., Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1975), pp. 209-230, p. 218.

⁶³ Stuart Sperry, *Shelley's Major Verse* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard UP, 1988), p. 81.

Titan not with external sufferings but with 'mutiny within' ('The Triumph of Life', l. 213): 'we will dwell / Beside it [the soul], like a vain loud multitude / Vexing the self-content of wisest men' (l. 485-9). Evil and suffering are revealed as consequences of Prometheus's championing of humankind: 'Dost thou boast the clear knowledge thou waken'dst for man? / Then was kindled within him a thirst which outran / Those perishing waters . . .' (l. 542-4). An awakening to the 'clear knowledge' of the inadequacy of the present situation is the general motor of reform. However, knowledge alone is insufficient to bring about change. The crucified Jesus Christ is presented by the Furies as an 'emblem' (l. 594) of revolutionary failure. Jesus's doctrines, distorted by institutions, have led to a moral paralysis:

Hypocrisy and custom make their minds
 The fanes of many a worship, now outworn.
 They dare not devise good for man's estate,
 And yet they know not that they do not dare.
 The good want power, but to weep barren tears.
 The powerful goodness want: worse need for
 them.
 The wise want love; and those who love want
 wisdom;
 And all best things are thus confused to ill
 (l. 622-628).

Prometheus painfully recognises his affinity with Jesus. He is anxious to distance himself from Jesus whose name has become a 'curse' (l. 604). His own good intentions have resulted only in disaster and confusion. By abandoning his role as a martyr on behalf of mankind, Prometheus seeks to revise the logic of Christianity and thus to create new possibilities of redemption.

It is Prometheus's victory over hatred and vengeful instincts that allows him to re-envision the French Revolution:

See! a disenchanted nation
 Springs like day from desolation;
 To Truth its state, is dedicate,
 And Freedom leads it forth, her mate;

A legioned band of linked brothers
 Whom Love calls children--
 'Tis another's:
 See how kindred murder kin! . . .
 Till Despair smothers
 The struggling world, which slaves and tyrants
 win (I, 567-577).

The Revolution, springing from republican ideals, results only in chaotic violence, a restoration of monarchy and a re-entrenchment of conservative forces all over Europe. The seeds of the failure lay in the binding logic of violence. By recognising revenge as 'defeat' rather than 'victory' (I, 643), Prometheus has surmounted this antagonism. He is 'gird[ed]' (I, 643) by these torturing visions to 'new endurance' (I, 644), to persevere till the determined hour of his release. His consolation at present is confined to visions of future bliss.

The visions of future bliss are ushered in by Spirits emanating from the 'dim caves of human thought' (I, 659). The significance of the series of six visions nevertheless remains opaque. Just like the visions of the past, the visions of the future are governed by a quick alternation of joy and despair. At the centre is an image of the poet, who 'feeds on the aerial kisses / Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses' (I, 741-2). One of the tribe of poets comes to 'succour' Prometheus (I, 751). The prophecy that these Spirits bring to Prometheus begins and ends in him (I, 800). The efficacy of all the self-knowledge gained through a strenuous reconciliation with one's own past and through a projection of one's own desires into the future leads to an awareness that love is the sole means of redemption: 'all hope [is] vain but love' (I, 824). Prometheus now can confirm the prophecy by assuming his destined role: 'I *would fain* / Be what it is my destiny to be, / The *saviour* and the strength of suffering man . . .' (I, 815-7, my emphasis), but this role cannot be accomplished without the help of his female counterpart. Knowledge of self gained by Prometheus releases a potential that needs to be realised by Asia.

Asia carries out the Promethean potentiality in the same way that a performance actualises the script on which it is based (Rajan, *Supplement*, p. 317). The performative nature of this part of the play expands the moral resolution achieved in the first act to an experiential event. The path to the realm of Demogorgon turns out to be a classroom for Asia and Panthea, 'a temple of nature' in Baudelaire's sense, as the semichorus sings:

There those enchanted eddies play
Of echoes, music-tongued, which draw,
By Demogorgon's mighty law
With melting rapture, or sweet awe,
All spirits on that secret way, . . .
(II, ii, 41-5).

The natural phenomena reveal themselves as observances of Demogorgon's 'mighty law'. But perception need not imply conviction:

those who *saw*
Say from the breathing earth behind
There steams a plume-uplifting wind
Which drives them on their path, while they
Believe their own swift wings and feet
The sweet desires within obey
(II, ii, 51-6, my emphases).

The disjunction between perception and conviction may be accounted for by a deeper belief that the 'sweet desires within' observe Demogorgon's law that governs the physical universe. This apparent disjunction leads Asia to experience new modes of perception which enable her to penetrate the 'mighty darkness' of Demogorgon, the '[u]ngazed upon and shapeless', in order to feel his 'living Spirit' (II, iv, 2, 5,7). This is indeed, as Angela Leighton notes, a 'journey of perception' which enables Asia to reach the 'treasured' spell (II, iv, 88), the 'voice unspoken' (II, i, 191), in order to cement the divorce between words and their utterance.⁶⁴ This journey prepares Asia for an emancipation

⁶⁴ Angela Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), p. 92.

through full self-knowledge which she acquires in a confrontation with Demogorgon.

Asia offers an account of genesis, which repudiates the Christian doctrine that God created the universe from chaos. She looks back to the earliest age of the universe, a Saturnian golden age, maintained by a harmony of four elements, heaven and earth, fire and water.⁶⁵ Peace was then secured but human beings remained 'semi-vital'. Prometheus and Jupiter rebelled against Saturn in order to restore to mankind their birthright. Prometheus empowered Jupiter, his comrade, under the single condition, 'let man be free' (II, iv, 45), but Jupiter condemned mankind to penury and decay. Prometheus stole fire from heaven and taught mankind to enslave the elements to alleviate their hardships. For his benevolence, Prometheus was enchained by Jupiter. Man is enslaved by a misuse of the Promethean dual ability to create and to destroy. He looks on his creation as a God who 'sees that it is glorious', and is driven on, till he becomes '[t]he wreck of his own will, the scorn of earth, / The outcast, the abandoned, the alone' (II, iv, 102-5). It is irrelevant to identify an external force, a Jupiter, as the agent of evil and suffering, for the source of both good and evil lies within the hearts of men. The idea of man as rendered 'outcast' by his own misguided capabilities recurs in Shelley's work. But here it is rendered dramatically rather than didactically. The awareness of the self-inflicted alienation of man from the universe comes as Asia recognises Demogorgon's oracles as echoes of her own words. She remarks:

So much I asked before, and my heart gave
The response thou hast given; and of such
truths
Each to itself must be the oracle.--

⁶⁵ As Curran points out, Asia's cosmology shows a direct borrowing from Peacock's abortive epic, 'Ahrimanes', which conflates a number of Greek accounts to substantiate the Zoroastrian myth. But Asia's account differs from those offered by the chorus of Earth's spirits and by the Mother Earth herself, which see the universe as already dominated by Jupiter's tyranny and with no Saturnian golden age preceding it. Curran explains that the Earth's different view reveals the limitation of her knowledge, while Asia presents a much more complete story. See Curran, *Annus*, pp. 39-42.

(II, iv, 121-3).

This self-knowledge is both a cause and consequence of the recognition of love as the one inviolable site of freedom: '[a]ll things are subject but eternal Love' (II, iv, 120).

Asia's descent to Demogorgon's realm enacts a larger confrontation with the past, which results in a self-understanding, the completion of which requires her journey backward to infancy in order to purge and in Bloom's term, to 'replenish' her potentiality (Bloom, *Mythmaking*, p. 127). During her journey through 'Age's icy caves', bypassing 'Manhood's dark and tossing waves', 'Youth's smooth ocean', and 'shadow-peopled Infancy' to a 'paradise of vaulted bowers' (II, v, 98-104), her body undergoes a gradual transfiguration. Asia's heroic endeavour exemplifies the transformation of the ossified temporal-spatial domain of the first act to an eternal present.

Asia's journey confirms Shelley's repudiation of a crude primitivism. Her journey to Infancy seeks to restore potentiality and to bring about the possibility of infinite creativity within every human being. This is an active enterprise, rather than a nostalgic backward glance towards a lost innocence which, according to Asia's account, never in fact existed. In the 'Essay on Christianity', Shelley propounds his objection to the 'philosophically false' theory of primitivism, which understands human history as a degeneration from a golden age and proposes a return to the pristine period. Shelley dismisses such theories as an expression of 'airy hopes' and urges instead a progressive abolition of institutions in unison with an advancement towards true virtue and universal knowledge (Murray, *Prose*, pp. 268-9). As Dawson notes, Shelley seems to agree with Rousseau's use of the idea of a golden age, or in Rousseau's terms, 'the state of nature', as a 'critical device' with which to interrogate the present situation, rather than as a historical actuality (Dawson,

p. 84).⁶⁶ The new world that Shelley delineates in the following acts is governed and propelled by the unified power of science and poetry, a picture developed from *Queen Mab*. Prometheus, having caused and suffered himself the consequences of a separation of reason and love, now comes to envisage his cave as embodying the mediating virtue of art (III, iii, 54-63). From this cave, a regenerate power will issue to remedy the damage inflicted by the separation of reason from love. This awareness of the potential perils caused by the unchecked progress of science and technology registers his qualification of the kind of scientific optimism propounded by Erasmus Darwin that he and many other Romantic writers were indebted to in various ways.⁶⁷ Shelley in the fourth act of *Prometheus Unbound* envisages an integration of science and art.

The fourth act was added to the play as an 'operatic' finale,⁶⁸ enacting what has been achieved in the previous acts. Rather than a 'description' of celebration, the final act invites the reader to experience its joy (Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, p. 165). This final act is organised as a sequence of events which recall the events in the Book of Revelation: the wedding celebration and the vision of the New Jerusalem. Above all, this act is a 'nuptial masque' on a cosmic scale, to celebrate Prometheus and Asia's marriage. As Abrams explains, the trope of marriage in the Old Testament represents reconciliation

⁶⁶ In the Préface to the *Discours sur les origines de l'inégalité*, Rousseau writes: 'Car ce n'est pas une légère entreprise de démêler ce qu'il y a d'originnaire et d'artificiel dans la nature actuelle de l'homme, et de bien connoître un Etat qui n'existe plus, qui n'a peut-être point existé, qui probablement n'existera jamais, et dont il est pourtant nécessaire d'avoir des Notions justes pour bien juger de nôtre état présent', Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed., Bernard Gaynebin and Marcel Raymond, 4 vols., (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-64), III, 123. For the evolution of Rousseau's idea of the 'noble savage', see Stelio Cro, *The Noble Savage: Allegory of Freedom* (Toronto: Wilfred Laurier UP, 1990), pp. 137-150.

⁶⁷ For a detailed discussion of the influence of Erasmus Darwin on the Romantic poets, see Desmond George King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* (London: Macmillan, 1986), quotation is from p. 221. Erasmus Darwin helped the Romantic poets to see the sexual impulses as the primal and essential drive in the universe, governing the world of plants as well as that of animals. See Butler, *Romantics*, pp. 129-30.

⁶⁸ The first act was finished in September, 1818, the second and third acts were finished by April, 1819. The fourth act was not started until December, 1819. The Peterloo massacre occurred in the interval between the first three and the final act. Ronald Tetreault describes the final act as a 'balletic' repetition, which shows the influence of Italian operas on Shelley. Tetreault, *The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1987), pp. 179, 181.

on its grandest scale.⁶⁹ The marriage described in *Prometheus Unbound* fulfils an iconoclastic mission in that it is modelled on the marriage of the Lamb but seeks to revise the eschatology mapped out in the final chapters of the Book of Revelation (20-22). Shelley explores the cosmic, scientific and spiritual implications of the marriage while repudiating the idea of the New Jerusalem as the ultimate event in human history. This 'nuptial masque' also offers a correction of the courtly masque, whose perverted versions are presented in 'The Masque of Anarchy' and 'Charles the First'.⁷⁰

The fourth act celebrates and at the same time constructs a new world, as the Spirits sing:

And our singing shall build
In the Void's loose field,
A world for the Spirit of Wisdom to wield;
We will take our plan
From the new world of man,
And our work shall be called the Promethean
(IV, 153-8).

The construction of the Promethean new world reveals itself in a temporal parallel with a reconciliation between opposing forces and contraries. The reconciliation is prefigured by the Dionysian route which leads Prometheus to his cave, and is presented in the trope of marriage, which is celebrated in the duet of the Moon and the Earth. The Dionysian route, 'beyond the peak / Of Bacchic Nysa, Maenad-haunted mountain, / And beyond Indus and its tribute rivers' (III, iii, 153-5), mapped out by the Mother Earth, indicates that the new role of Prometheus is a Dionysian one as an inspirer under the principle of love and fecundity.⁷¹

⁶⁹ M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: Norton, 1973), pp. 41-5, 306.

⁷⁰ Vargo describes the fourth act as a 'democratic masque', p. 51.

⁷¹ Curran points out that this route was taken by Dionysus and his followers traversing Asia to enter Greece. Asia's descent to Demogorgon's realm, the portal of which hurls up 'oracular vapour' (II, iii, 4) is also associated with Dionysian inspiration. The ultimate lesson that Demogorgon teaches Asia is that 'To these [mutabilities] / All things are subject but eternal love' (II, iv, 119-20). These allusions to Dionysus point to the Orphic principle that organises the new world (IV, 415). See *Annus*, pp. 91-2.

As the ultimate expression of Shelley's Enlightenment belief in the emancipatory power of knowledge, the discovery of the true nature of man and his world precedes a celebration of universal reconciliation. Ione's and Panthea's visions illustrate the working of the new consciousness. They are drawn mainly from two sources, Ezekiel (1:4-28) and *Paradise Lost* (VI, 749-59).⁷² Shelley offers models both of the individual psyche and of the universe. These visions are governed by a principle of doubleness, which depends on co-operation rather than opposition, as in the doctrine of Manichaeism. The two chariots emerge from two openings of the same forest, where two runnels of a rivulet flow, like sisters '[t]urning their dear disunion to an isle / Of lovely grief . . .' (IV, 194-201). The two visions complement each other like Panthea and Ione. Their advent is described as an 'ocean-like enchantment of strong sound, / Which flows intenser, keener, deeper yet / Under the ground and through the windless air' (IV, 202-5).

In Ione's vision, the chariot is related to Asia's chariot in the second act by its moon-like quality. In its lightness, agility, and gentleness, it also recalls Ariel in *The Tempest*. The chariot, like a new moon under the 'canopy' of gentle darkness cast by the old moon, presages the double picture of the new and the old which will unfold in Panthea's vision. The chariot moves with wheels like 'solid clouds', which roll and grow as with an 'inward wind' (IV, 214, 218). Its inward generating power exemplifies the self-sufficiency of the new universe.⁷³ The charioteer, a winged Infant, has a white countenance which suggests Christ in his triumphal chariot in the Book of Revelation. His mild appearance belies his power, for from his dark eyes issues fire that

⁷² Ants Oras maintains a stronger influence of Milton. See Ants Oras, "The Multitudinous Orb": Some Miltonic Elements in Shelley, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 16 (1955), 247-57, p. 248. Shelley retains the chariots as harbingers of divine revelation (as in Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation) and as the vehicle of ultimate triumph (like Christ's chariot in Milton) but transposes the militant quality of the latter onto Demogorgon's chariot in the third act.

⁷³ Bloom follows Frye's view that both Blake's and Shelley's chariots are propelled by an inward power, which is modelled on Ezekiel. Bloom, *Mythmaking*, p. 232.

tempers the cold and radiant air around as a storm is poured from jagged clouds (IV, 225-230). Ione's vision serves as a miniature of and a prelude to Panthea's vision.

Panthea's vision includes two aspects: the multitudinous orbs and the subterranean world of the dead. The first illustrates that the forces and principles operating in the natural and in the human realms are the same:

A sphere, which is as many thousand spheres,
Solid as crystal, yet through all its mass
Flow, as through empty space, music and light:
Ten thousand orbs involving and involved, . . .
Sphere within sphere; and every space between
Peopled with unimaginable shapes
Such as ghosts dream dwell in the lampless
deep,
Yet each inter-transparent, and they whirl
Over each other with a thousand motions, . . .
And with the force of self-destroying
swiftness,
Intensely, slowly, solemnly roll on-- . . .
(IV, 238-250).

The sphere's concentric structure has its prototype in Ezekiel and *Paradise Lost*. Moreover, as Desmond King-Hele points out, Shelley explores the scientific foundation of this conventional biblical trope and presents here a picture of the molecular system that sustains the structure of the universe.⁷⁴

The multitudinous orb suggests a correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm, for, earlier on, Panthea's eyes are described by Asia as 'orb within orb' (II, i, 117). The Spirit of the Earth that sleeps within Panthea's sphere recalls the shape of Prometheus that Asia sees in Panthea's eyes, which triggers the whole movement of regeneration. In a similar way, the Spirit of the Earth sleeping at the centre of the swift moving sphere, 'mock[ing]' (both teasing and imitating) the 'orb's harmony', embodies the generating power of

⁷⁴ My reading of the scientific foundation of Shelley's cosmic imagery is indebted to Desmond King-Hele, *Shelley: His Thought and Work*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1971), especially, pp. 177-194.

the new universe. These interlocking allusions exemplify the dynamic of the play. The sphere is mobilised by a power resulting from a dynamic equilibrium between centripetal and centrifugal forces. This equilibrium recalls the balance achieved by the 'amphisbaenic snake' holding together the coursers of a chariot which is bound to the Temple in the air (III, iv, 119). The balance, which keeps the Temple in place, works to move the sphere forward. But it is a precarious balance, for the space between the spheres is inhabited by 'unimaginable shapes', which threaten to disrupt the smooth movement of the sphere. The precarious nature of the dynamic balance invites a comparison with Vico's theory of history as an 'eternal cycle'.

Giambattista Vico (1688-1744) expounds his theory of history in *The New Science* (whose third edition appeared in 1744), an epoch-making study which established history into a humane discipline.⁷⁵ Vico maintains that human history develops in three stages, the age of gods (the theistic), the age of heroes (the semi-theistic) and the age of men (the humanist). During the first age men are subjugated by their fear of gods. In the second age the majority of the people (the plebeians) are still dominated by their rulers (the patricians). Not until the third age do men win freedom by engaging in a struggle against their rulers. However, Vico stresses the ever present possibility of a relapse, a 'ricorso', back to barbarianism. The relapse begins, according to Vico, almost at the same time as civilisation reaches its peak, for as soon as men realise that the regulations upon which society has been maintained are actually a man-made construct, which allow alteration, they become licentious. Social order then disintegrates. History plunges back to barbarism. Vico describes the barbaric state as characterised by an economic and mercantile fragmentation in which men no longer see the wholeness of things. The relapse, in Vico's view, is as inevitable as the progress is ineluctable.

⁷⁵ Vico's reputation was largely posthumous, but he exerted immense influence on nineteenth-century German thinkers, such as Goethe and Herder. But there is no evidence to prove that Shelley came across Vico in either French or German sources.

Vico refutes the prevalent Enlightenment views of history, which represent it either as an optimistic onward linear progress, as in the views of the French thinker August Comte, and the Scottish thinker Dugald Stewart, or a pessimistic process of decline, as in the view of Voltaire and Rousseau.⁷⁶ Vico's own view was formulated through a study of the irrational elements in history. He argues that it is the 'double-edged' reason that initiates the process of history.⁷⁷ In the course of history, perfection is revealed as conceptually incoherent, for gain in some areas entails loss in others at any given stage, and a state when all beneficent qualities are compatible with each other is inconceivable. Vico maintains the theory of an 'ideal eternal history', the eternal cycle of which, as Sir Isaiah Berlin notes, allows 'no vision of the march of mankind toward final perfection' (Berlin, in Taliacozzo, pp. 254, 262). Vico's refusal to envisage perfection might be attributed to his Catholic belief which forbids him to usurp the right of Providence.

The precarious progress implied in Vico's *The New Science* shows an affinity with Shelley's notion that decline is inherent in the very force of progress.⁷⁸ The 'double-edged' reason in Vico's theory is paralleled in Shelley's drama by the precarious balance between conflicting forces, which propels and maintains the movement of the sphere.

With mighty whirl the multitudinous orb
Grinds the bright brook into an azure mist
Of elemental subtlety, like light,
And the wild odour of the forest flowers, . . .
Round its intense yet self-conflicting speed,
Seem *kneaded into one aerial mass*
Which drowns the sense
(IV, 253-261, my emphases).

⁷⁶ Robert Nisbet, 'Vico and the Idea of Progress', in *Vico and Contemporary Thought*, ed., by Giorgio Taliacozzo, Michael Mooney, and Donald Phillip Verene (London: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 235-47.

⁷⁷ Isaiah Berlin, 'Vico and the Ideal of the Enlightenment', in Taliacozzo, pp. 250-63.

⁷⁸ The similarity between Shelley and Vico might result from their relativist study of ancient civilisation. Vico's view of history as an organic process governed by Providence might have seemed deterministic to Shelley. But Shelley would have agreed with Vico's admiration of the 'sublime poet' Homer, whose poetry inspired and represented heroic qualities which had the potential to change the course of history.

The orb grinds the brook into a mist like light and kneads odour, music and light into 'one aerial mass'. This power also shoots '[v]ast beams' from a star upon the forehead of the Spirit of the Earth. The beams whirl as the orb whirls, '[f]illing the abyss with sun-like lightnings' (IV, 270-6). This power emerges from a source of purified energy to illuminate history. It has a spectral double in Jupiter, the '[s]ceptred curse' (IV, 339), who 'knead[s] down [the Earth's] children's bones . . . to *one void mass* battering and blending' (IV, 342-3, my emphases). The former serves as a correction of the latter.

The ether-like beams illuminate two aspects of the earth: the 'secrets of the earth's deep heart', where the origins of things are located (IV, 279-287), and the 'melancholy ruins / Of cancelled cycles' (IV, 288-9), in which all humanity is represented, like the dinosaurs, as subject to extinction in the passage of time. As Woodring points out, this vision of 'cancelled cycles' is closer to Georges Cuvier's concept of cataclysmic change than to Erasmus Darwin's proto-theory of evolution.⁷⁹ In this 'retrograde apocalypse',⁸⁰ the old world is evoked, as the curse is evoked, in order to be cancelled. The picture of the underworld is modelled on the cursed realm of the dead in the first book of *Paradise Lost* and also corresponds to the first act of the lyrical drama. By an analogy between the abolition of the ancient regime and the inevitable and irrevocable process of natural change, Shelley seeks to secure a moral authority for his advocacy of revolution. The violence inherent in revolution is soon to be defused by its antithesis, the principle of love, enacted in the duet of the Earth and the Moon.

The 'vaporious exultation' (IV, 321), that issues from Prometheus's cave, animates the Earth and in turn 'penetrates' the 'frozen frame' of the Moon (IV,

⁷⁹ Carl Woodring, *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard UP, 1970), p. 306.

⁸⁰ Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982), p. 34.

328). Their duet is generated and sustained by the same power that regulates the universe, as the Moon sings:

Thou art speeding round the Sun
Brightest world of many a one;

...
I, thy crystal paramour,
Borne beside thee by a power
Like the polar Paradise,
Magnet-like of lovers' eyes; . .
(IV, 457-466).

In this epithalamion for the marriage of Prometheus and Asia, Shelley constructs a tapestry richly woven with occult and scientific allusions. First, the Earth and the Moon represent the contrary elements in alchemy that coalesce into a superior element which releases an ether-like substance and energy to produce gold.⁸¹ Second, the duet embodies the dynamic balance between the powers of repulsion and attraction that sustains the planetary system. The allusion to gravity materialises in the form of a life-giving ether the principle of love that animates and governs the new world (Curran, *Annus*, pp. 107-8).

In the new world man is reconciled with his own past and therefore liberated from any internal conflict or external tyranny. As the Spirit of the Hour earlier observes:

The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains,
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed--but man;
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree,--the king
Over himself; just, gentle, wise--but man: . . .
(III, iv, 193-7).

The new man is thus 'restored', as a leprous child is 'restored' by the might of healing springs, to his original wholesome state (IV, 393, 390). He inhabits

⁸¹ Abrams notes that the Earth and the Moon represent 'material correlatives' of universal love, whose alchemical marriage serves as the goal of a 'Hermetic quest' for the energy conducive to produce gold. Abrams, *Supernaturalism*, p. 307.

and represents a universe which returns to an imaginary state of undifferentiated unity:

Man, oh, not men! a chain of linked thought,
Of love and might to be divided not,
Compelling the elements with adamant stress-
-
As the Sun rules, even with a tyrant's gaze,
The unquiet Republic of the maze
Of Planets, struggling fierce towards Heaven's
free wilderness (IV, 394-9).

The unified universe helps to explain the identity of apparently contrary entities, Prometheus's cave, Demogorgon's realm, and the cave of the Earth. The newly won knowledge of self and the universe promises to bridge the gap between 'love and might', the divorce of which is responsible for all our woes and confusion. With this knowledge, man is to 'rule' the universe as the sun rules the solar system. A new order will be established, in accordance with the true nature of mankind and of the universe.

The cosmic nuptial masque is cut short by the arrival of Demogorgon. Demogorgon's appearance at this point completes his function in the play. He first appears in the second act as the oracle which is recognised as an echo of Asia's own thoughts. He appears for the second time to drag Jupiter with him to the 'darkness' where they will dwell together (III, i, 55-6). In the final act, Demogorgon arrives as a 'mighty Power', which is like darkness. The reference to the night suggests that Demogorgon represents the first cause, like the chaos in which the universe has its origin. His function in the third act seems to endow him with the role of an active agent of change, as, in Matthews's and Paul Foot's view, representing the power of the people, figured as a volcanic energy.⁸² An alternative view held by Bloom regards Demogorgon as the principle of dialectic (Bloom, *Mythmaking*, p. 100), which determines the

⁸² G. M. Matthews, 'A Volcano's Voice in Shelley', *English Literary History*, 24 (1957), 191-228, p. 200. Paul Foot regards Demogorgon as representing a 'united and risen people' whose power, envisaged in terms of volcanic eruption, can overthrow tyranny. Foot, *Red Shelley* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980), pp. 199-200.

direction that history will take. I would argue that the three appearances together show that he is not an agent of change, but rather a proxy who undertakes an action already accomplished by Prometheus. Demogorgon represents some force outside history which gives it a definite shape. He possesses an authority that is constituted and sanctioned by physical laws. The extent of his power is in exact proportion to Prometheus's knowledge of the physical laws and of himself.⁸³

Demogorgon sums up a problem crucial to the Romantic revolutionaries. As Rajan notes, he is at once the first cause, identified with Eternity (III, i, 52) and the effective cause, identified as active within history. Thus, he occupies at once the sphere of thought and actuality (Rajan, *Supplement*, pp. 304-5). As a combination of categorically contradictory terms he shows Shelley's attempt to deal with the problem of revolutionary violence. Shelley in moulding this inscrutable character tries to contain aggression and convert it into a rejuvenating power.⁸⁴ Demogorgon summons all participants of the masque to announce the secret of history:

Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,--
These are the seals of that most firm assurance
Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;
And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,
Mother of many acts and hours, should free
The serpent that would clasp her with his
length--
These are the spells by which to reassume
An empire o'er the disentangled Doom

⁸³ My view of Demogorgon comes closer to King-Hele's. He maintains that Demogorgon is 'an Immanent Will, quiescent till activated by advances in the mind of Man', see King-Hele, *Shelley*, p. 179.

⁸⁴ The dethronement of Jupiter underscores the violence inherent in revolution. Demogorgon, the agent of this violent act, embodies a thematic disjunction between the logic of love and the logic of violence. Rajan notes that Prometheus's 'unilateral' forgiveness is not sufficient to topple Jupiter. Jupiter's dethronement renders the Promethean 'reintegration' as an act of 'repression'. See Rajan, *Supplement*, p. 303. Ulmer employs the Freudian theory of the family romance to explain the downfall of Jupiter as an expression of Prometheus's Oedipal aggression and the resurgence of the serpent as the return of the repressed (Ulmer, pp. 80-1). I argue that the obscurity of Demogorgon represents Shelley's desperate attempt to bring together the two mutually exclusive logics of love and of violence. The possible resurgence of the serpent actually keeps these two logics apart and thus secures a forever unattainable ideal of unity.

(IV, 562-68).

His final sermon puts an end to one phase of the struggle between the serpent and Prometheus which begins the play, and finally determines the shape of the play, which evolves from the binding antagonism between Prometheus and Jupiter in the first act, to the linear progress exemplified by Asia and Panthea's journey, to the circular movement exemplified by the Earth-Moon duet, and finally anticipates a return to its beginning. The play is thus structured like an ouroboros, the tail-eating serpent which coils underneath Demogorgon's throne (II, iii, 97).⁸⁵ The structure transforms an opposition of contraries, Prometheus and Jupiter, into an apposition of complements: Prometheus and Asia, Asia and her two sisters, Asia's and Demogorgon's two chariots, the Spirit of the Earth and the Spirit of the Hour, the two visions of the Oceanic sisters, and finally the Earth and the Moon. The circular shape of the play is also self-reflexive. Toward the end of the third act the Spirit of the Hour announces:

The painted veil, by those who were, called
life,
Which mimicked, as with colours idly spread,
All men believed or hoped, is torn aside-- . . .
(III, iv, 190-2).

The play achieves its shape only by dismissing itself. In this way, it conveys and embodies the ultimate message that the new world is not a regained paradise, but a dynamic process in need of continuous renewal. The play evolves as history evolves, in a continual re-vision of and readjustment to what has occurred before (Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, p. 168). Shelley thus does not present a particular version of historical events, but rather adumbrates a general principle from which to view history, offering not a new myth but a process of mythmaking (Bloom, *Mythmaking*, p. 123).

⁸⁵ The idea of an ouroboros is indebted to Curran, *Annus*, pp. 51-2, and Fraistat, pp. 185-6. However, I agree with Cronin's argument that Curran's view of the Zoroastrian principle dominating the entire play emphasises the Zoroastrian duality out of proportion with the dynamic structure of the play. See Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, p. 257, note 6; Curran, *Annus*, pp. 67-81.

The shape of the play helps to explain Shelley's insistent use of negatives, the most emphatic example being the description of the changed world by the Spirit of the Hour.⁸⁶ The new world is depicted at the end of the third act as a place where there is no end to effort and a place whose exact configuration remains undefined:

The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed--but man:
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree,-- the king
Over himself; just, gentle, wise--but man:
Passionless? no--yet free from guilt or pain,
Which were, for his will made, or suffered
 them,
Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,
From chance, and death, and mutability,
The clogs of that which else might oversoar
The loftiest star of unascended Heaven
Pinnacled dim in the intense inane
(III, iv, 193-204).

Shelley's refusal to envisage the exact contours of the new world might be attributed to his refusal to envisage a fixed state of perfection, an anarchist stance shared by Proudhon.⁸⁷ In the 'Essay on Christianity', Shelley asserts that '[t]he Universal Being can only be described or defined by negatives which deny his subjection to the laws of all inferior existence. Where indefiniteness ends idolatry and anthropomorphism begin' (Murray, *Prose*, p. 252). The negatives function not only to guard against falling victim to the anthropomorphic tendency that he despises in orthodox religion, but more positively to represent a double vision of the old and the new. In the lyrical drama, there are two kinds of negatives. One locates the absence of an object of desire, such as the 'unreclaiming tears' (III, iv, 187), which in the scene of sacrifice reveal the impotence of human misery. The other celebrates freedom

⁸⁶ This discussion of negatives is indebted to Timothy Webb, 'The Unascended Heaven: Negatives in *Prometheus Unbound*', in *Shelley Revolved*, ed., by Kelvin Everest (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1983), pp. 37-62.

⁸⁷ Proudhon in his *The Philosophy of Progress* argues that the idea of perfection and a pursuit of Absolute as conducive to oppression. See Passmore, p. 184.

from constriction, such as 'kingless throne' (II, iv, 149), which suggests a 'veil of negativity' waiting to be stripped away from an untarnished essence (Webb, 'Unascended', pp. 47, 55). The negatives unleash potentiality, both the potentiality to achieve and to liberate.

The thematic structure of the play emphatically conveys the central message that Prometheus's cave, the ideal Athens, should remain at once an ultimate goal and a starting point for human endeavour. Prometheus's cave is not a 'safe haven', like the Temple of the Spirit which rewards Laon and Cythna for their martyrdom in *Laon and Cythna*, but an impossible ideal beyond the mortal realm. It represents at once two contrary things. First it is the circumference, the loftiest star in the 'intense inane', the unattainability of which secures the unending process of perfectibility. Second, it is the centre, where the source of power is located. But it is a centre prone to destabilise itself, just as the centre of the sphere where the Spirit of the Earth sleeps cannot forestall the disruption from the 'unimaginable shapes' peopling the 'lampless deep' (IV, 244-5). The Promethean potentiality depends on something like the transgressive function that art fulfils in Michel Foucault's view of history. For Foucault, as well as for Shelley, limits may be transgressed but not erased.⁸⁸ In this way, Shelley revises the eschatology implied in the Book of Revelation, in which John envisages the New Jerusalem as the end of history, descending from heaven after Christ's ultimate victory over the Dragon. Instead, Shelley not only refuses to imagine the end of history but more importantly subjects his Promethean New World to the resurgent threat of the serpent. For him there is no end of history, since the empire will inevitably need to be reassumed. In this way, perfectibility is ensured at the high price of a constant anxiety over an indeterminate future. This anxiety is left unresolved in *Prometheus Unbound*, but is explored in a later lyrical drama, *Hellas*.

⁸⁸ Jon Simons, *Foucault and the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 69.

Prometheus Unbound presents Shelley's theory of history on its most idealist level. The play stands as Shelley's most sustained attempt to create a syncretic ur-myth incorporating the scientific models and theological paradigms, which served as the two principal sources on which the Enlightenment thinkers drew.⁸⁹ Shelley's theory of history evolves as an engagement with the past understood as constituted by both political and literary history. Shelley radically revises the plot of Aeschylus's 'Prometheus Bound' and his own Prometheus suggests a similar revision of Milton's Satan.⁹⁰ A reconciliation with the past, as Shelley sees it, brings one back to the state of infancy, that is, the state of perfectibility, where we may revitalise the 'creative faculty to imagine that which we know' and the 'generous impulse to act that which we imagine' (*SPP*, p. 502). The potentiality thus released will construct a new world upon the waste of the old one. But the new world must be subject to change and collapse in order not to be ossified. Freedom must be forever regenerated because it serves itself as a regenerating force. The 'multitudinous orb' best exemplifies this dynamic view of history. History is depicted, as Michael Scrivener argues, as a 'process of dialectical conflict', a succession of moments in which liberty and tyranny achieve varying states of equilibrium (Scrivener, p. 212). This is a view different from Vico's providential determinism and from Hegel's telos-oriented dialectical theory.⁹¹ The emphasis on potentiality begs a crucial question in Shelley's political writings. It points to an immanent revolution, the momentum of which is inherited from the period of the 1790s. The interiorisation of politics celebrates the triumph of the Mind but at the same threatens to diminish the political to the aesthetic, a divorce of poetry from its effectual domain. This inward-looking revolution

⁸⁹ René Wellek, *The Rise of English Literary History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 72-3.

⁹⁰ For Shelley's use of Aeschylus's 'Prometheus Bound', see Burnett Weaver, 'Prometheus Bound and Prometheus Unbound', *PMLA*, 64 (1949), pp. 115-33. For Shelley's revision of Milton's Satan, see Bloom, *Mythmaking*, p. 53.

⁹¹ The differences and similarities between Shelley's and Hegel's theories of history are discussed in Neth, the second chapter.

reflects the sense of powerlessness painfully felt by the radical reformers of Shelley's generation.⁹² The feeling of impotent outrage reluctantly transformed into a kind of spiritual triumph is explored in its full psychological aspects in *Hellas*.

*But Greece and her foundations are
Built below the tide of war,
Based on the crystalline sea
Of thought and its eternity;
Her citizens, imperial spirits,
Rule the present from the past,
On all this world of men inherits
Their seal is set--
(Hellas, ll. 696-702).*

Hellas presents Shelley's deeper exploration into the complexity of history. The Greek struggle for independence from Turkish rule provided Shelley with a contemporary mandate to investigate the eternal struggle for Liberty. His sympathy for Greece was largely shared by the English radicals. But his attachment to the Greek cause was motivated by more than simply political concerns. Athens for Shelley stands as a model for all human cultural and political achievement. The rise and fall of Athenian values constitute the organising pattern of history. The history of Athens demonstrates that art not only reflects the environment from which it is produced but acts as a renovating force of civilisation. Art, appealing to the emotive faculties, also leads us to see the plight of individuals on both sides of the struggle for

⁹² The view that Shelley advocates a theodicy of art is forcefully propounded by a number of critics. Abrams identifies an 'apocalypse of imagination' in the major Romantic poets, see *Natural Supernaturalism*, pp. 335-9, 342-4. Rajan also notes the tendency of *Prometheus Unbound* to 'semiotise the future use of aesthetic to evoke Promethean renewal', *Supplement*, p. 306. Bryan Shelley reads *Prometheus Unbound* as an 'internalised providential history', see Bryan Shelley, *Shelley and Scripture: the Interpreting Angel* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1994) p. 116. But I argue against the naive spiritual triumph based on aestheticism that the critics perceive in Shelley, for it implies a complacency that Shelley strives to avoid or even abhors. I find that Shelley's aestheticising tendency in *Prometheus Unbound* actually carries potent political messages, because it represents Shelley's strenuous attempt to open poetry to history (Goldsmith, p. v) rather than to use poetry to shelter himself against history.

Liberty. The lyrical drama, *Hellas*, at once a historical drama, like 'The Cenci', and a drama of idealism, like *Prometheus Unbound* (Wasserman, p. 380), explores the psychological dimensions of the idealistic resolutions achieved in *Prometheus Unbound*.

Shelley expresses his admiration of Greek civilisation and his respect for their contemporary struggle for independence in the Preface to *Hellas*. The title, suggested by Edward Williams, indicates that the play seeks to revive the spirit of Athens, rather than simply expresses support for modern Greek nationalism (Wasserman, pp. 374-5). Shelley shared with the English radical writers the notion that in our desire for political liberty 'we are all Greeks',⁹³ and that Greek civilisation has 'propagated impulses which cannot cease' to 'ennoble and delight mankind until the extinction of the race' (*SPP*, p. 409). The Greek independence movement holds out to Shelley the possibility of renewing the achievements that Athens once embodied. The Greek resistance to the 'Turkish empire is not only one of the episodes in the 'great drama of the revival of liberty' (*SPP*, p. 410), but also part of the widespread struggle in the Mediterranean region, the success of which, as Mary notes, will decide the destiny of the world (Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 480). Using the Greco-Turkish conflict as a point of departure, Shelley seeks both to arouse the 'rulers of the civilised world' from their 'apathy' and to awaken the English public to the oppression from which they suffer, like the Greeks. This political intention is incorporated within a picture of history which appears to be cyclic, yet the ultimate direction of which remains indeterminate.

⁹³ For a detailed discussion of the conflicting views of Greece, its literature and history, held by the conservatives and the radicals in England, see Timothy Webb, *English Romantic Hellenism: 1700-1824* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1982). Webb notes that the English concern with Greek liberty was centred not so much on the rights of man as on a sympathetic identification with the Greek struggle to break free from Turkish rule. The popular radical magazine, the *Black Dwarf*, in an article on Peterloo (1 December, 1819), even described the crowd as 'each helpless Greek' and the yeomanry as 'ye English Janizaries of the North'. See Webb, *Hellenism*, p. 29.

The structure of the play is modelled on Aeschylus's 'The Persians'. The fundamental difference between Shelley's play and Aeschylus's lies in that the Greek tragedian wrote his play to celebrate the Greek victory over Xerxes in 480 BC but Shelley wrote when the outcome of the struggle was undecided (Wasserman, pp. 377, 383). By choosing Aeschylus's play as his model, Shelley attempts, as it were, to bridge the temporal space of more than two thousand years in order to place the contemporary battle under the auspices of the earlier victory, and to suggest that both are political episodes in the 'great drama of the revival of liberty'. Shelley's assimilation of Aeschylus thus presents itself as a 'literary analogue' of history's cyclic repetition, which thematises the 'atemporal' truth of the struggle for Liberty (Wasserman, p. 378).

The pattern of cyclic repetition is enacted in Mahmud's dream of his ancestor's conquest of Constantinople. But this is a repetition of violence which augurs the imminent defeat of Mahmud's force. Ahasuerus is summoned to interpret this dream. Instead of answering the specific questions that Mahmud raises, Ahasuerus explains the law of eternity:

Sultan! talk no more
Of thee and me, the future and the past;
But look on that which cannot change--the One,
The unborn and the undying (*ll.* 767-9).

Ahasuerus conjures up the phantom of Mahomet the Second in order to show Mahmud that '[t]he Past / Now stands before thee like an Incarnation / Of the To-come; yet wouldst thou commune with / That portion of thyself which was ere thou / Didst start for this brief race whose crown is death' (*ll.* 852-6). The eternal law of the universe, for Mahmud the despot, is a repetitive cycle which leads finally to death. This nightmarish repetition finds an echo in the astronomical imagery of the sun, the moon and the evening star. A succession of these three heavenly bodies represents the succession of religious powers from Christianity to Islam and points to the beginning of a new order (*ll.* 337-

47) (Wasserman, pp. 396-8). But the succession itself, built on an analogy with the diurnal cycle, is not exempt from repetitive return and collapse.

The last chorus summarises the pattern of degradation and revival:

The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
...
Oh! write not more the tale of Troy,
If earth Death's scroll must be!
...
Another Athens shall arise,
And to remoter time
Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
The splendour of its prime;
...
Oh, cease! must hate and death return?
Cease! must men kill and die?
Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
of bitter prophecy.
The world is weary of its past,
Oh, might it die or rest at last!
(ll. 1060-1101)

The note of celebration is counterpointed by a note of despair. A new Athens will arise, but it is uncertain when, and it, too, will be threatened with a resurgence of a blood-stained past. Earlier in the play, a country in the West is envisaged as a new Athens: 'as from night, / Reassuming fiery flight, / From the West swift Freedom came, ... / A second sun arrayed in flame, ... (ll. 64-9). This passage expresses Shelley's recurrent belief that America might be the means by which Europe will recover its Liberty. In 'Charles the First', Hampden also projects his hopes onto the new world: 'thou / Fair star, ... Receive, thou young of Paradise. / These exiles from the old and sinful world! (IV, 18-36). Hampden imagines this new world by drawing on the picture of England described by Gaunt in *Richard the Second* (II, i, 40-59), in an irony aimed at the degraded old world, especially England. In 'Tielas', Shelley attempts not only to sharpen the contrast between the new world and the old, but more importantly to elevate the eternal ideal of Athens above all temporal constrictions. In other words, America represents only another

incarnation of Athens. His sympathy for Greek independence is represented as escaping partisanship, because it expresses an adherence to a timeless, ahistorical ideal of Liberty.

In *Hellas*, a return to the golden age is not, as Wasserman suggests through allusion to the final chorus of Virgil's fourth Eclogue (Wasserman, p. 409), represented as inevitable. Set against the background of an ongoing battle, *Hellas* examines the ideal of Athens at a moment of crisis. The ideal is renewable but is also susceptible of destruction. Such a picture of an indeterminate destiny questions Shelley's earlier belief in a 'reflux in the tide of human things' which will inevitably carry the 'shipwrecked hopes' of men into a 'secure haven' after the storms (Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 33). Shelley, as it were, summons the 'unimaginable shapes' who dwell in the 'lampsless deep' (*Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 244-5) to disrupt his confident faith in the Promethean new world. The uncertain picture presented in *Hellas* is reminiscent of the tone of despair and fear that ends the 'Ode to Liberty'. This play, as Mary notes, argues for an ultimate amelioration but at the same time grieves over the 'vicissitudes' to be endured in the interval (Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 481).

Despite its reservations, *Hellas* exemplifies the power of poetry to renew the spirit of Liberty. It continues to explore the belief expressed in 'Charles the First' that the power of poetry exceeds that of the institutionalised power structures. Shelley wrenches his play from the shadow of servile conformity to the kind of nationalistic radicalism that Aeschylus's play succumbs to. Shelley portrays the plight of those on both sides of the struggle in an effort to detach the spirit of Liberty from the repetitive cycle of conquest and retribution.

Shelley's admiration for Greek civilisation had its roots in Peacock's circle at Marlow (1817).⁹⁴ Their Hellenism encouraged them to develop a syncretic

⁹⁴ The discussion of Shelley's Hellenism is indebted to Butler, *Romantics*, especially the fifth chapter on the Cult of the South.

mythology, which embraced aspects of Greek paganism, Zoroastrianism, etc., in opposition to the monopoly over mythology claimed by orthodox Christians. It allowed them to generate an ethic founded on an acceptance of sexuality and the body in opposition to Christian asceticism.⁹⁵ And in spite of Shelley's awareness that the Greek democratic ideal was compromised by slavery and by the subjugation of women,⁹⁶ it continued to offer an alternative to the oligarchic government of England. Shelley sees ancient Greek civilisation as 'propagat[ing]' impulses which cannot cease to 'ennoble and delight' mankind (Preface to 'Hellas', Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 447). He attempts to revitalise these ennobling 'impulses', rather than simply imitate the formal perfection of Greek art. In this way, his admiration of Greece differs from Johann Joachim Winckelmann's.⁹⁷ Winckelmann regards ancient Greek art as having reached a point of perfection that could be imitated but not surpassed. For him, Greek art offers prescriptive norms, a notion that differs radically from Shelley's innovative, even subversive, use of his Greek models (Neth, p. 280).

'Hellas' extends the psychological exploration that concerned him in *Prometheus Unbound* to include the plight of the tyrant. He employs the conventions of Greek tragedy to cast the captive women as a chorus that helps him to insist on a human dimension in the Greco-Turkish conflict (Wasserman, pp. 383-4).⁹⁸ The psychological portrayal of the tyrant and the chorus is at the centre of the play, but the tyrant is depicted as an individual whereas the chorus

⁹⁵ Shelley's 'Witch of Atlas' and 'Epipsychidion' best represent his celebration of the Greek spirit, which for Keats, stands for the Religion of Joy and Beauty (Webb, *Hellenism*, p. 25).

⁹⁶ See Shelley's introduction to his translation of Plato's 'The Symposium', 'A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love', David Lee Clark, pp. 216-23.

⁹⁷ Shelley read the French translation of Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art*, during the period from 24 December 1818 to 3 January 1819 in Naples and Rome and later in 1819. See Mary, i, 246-56.

⁹⁸ The dramatisation of the conflicts is also modelled on Calderón's 'Constant Prince', in which the conflict between the Christian Portuguese (who was held captive) and the Mohammedan Moors is set in the captor's country. For the influence of Calderón see Thomas Medwin, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed., H. Buxton Forman (London: 1919), p. 353, note. For a detailed discussion of Shelley's reading and translation of Calderón, see Timothy Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1976), pp. 204-36.

remains a group. Hence, the tyrant remains the focus of our attention. At the beginning of the play, Mahmud is troubled by his enigmatic dream of his ancestor, and besieged by reports of victory and defeat. Beneath his depravity, we see his despair and fear. Even at the moment of victory, he expresses a profound awareness of his own predicament:

When th' orient moon of Islam roll'd in triumph
From Caucasus to White Ceraunia!
Ruin above, and anarchy below;
Terror without, and treachery within;
The chalice of destruction full, and all
Thirsting to drink, and who among us dares
To dash it from his lips? and where is hope?
(ll. 266-272).

He finds no hope and no repose. He is trapped in a fearful cycle of defeat and victory neither of which offers solace: 'what were Defeat when Victory must appall? / Or Danger, when Security looks pale?' (ll. 359-60). The confrontation with the victorious Mahomet the Second only enables him to recognise his plight. The juxtaposition of this confrontation with the following report of victory dramatises the irony of his transient reprieve. On hearing the shout of victory, Mahmud exclaims:

Weak lightning before darkness! poor faint
smile
Of dying Islam! Voice which art the response
Of hollow weakness! Do I wake and live?
(ll. 915-7).

In the figure of Mahmud, Shelley offers his finest study of the effect of tyranny and violence on the perpetrator himself. Like a Greek tragic hero, he inspires our pity and fear.

Shelley's concern for the individuals embroiled in war is dramatised in the confrontation between the Turkish soldiers and the Greek rebels. The besieged Greeks heroically take their own life in defiance of the Turks. As Mahmud's follower, Hassan, reports:

So these survivors, each by different ways,
Some strange, all sudden, none dishonourable,
Met in triumphant death; . . . (ll. 399-401).

The Turkish soldiers, victorious, are reduced to slaves by the triumphant death of their opponents. The depravity of the despot's army is thus set against the heroism of the oppressed. But the heroism of the Greeks is associated with a desire for retribution, as one of the dying Greeks prophesies: 'Famine, and Pestilence, / And Panic, shall wage war upon our side' (ll. 439-40). A cycle of violence entangles the two sides in mutual destruction. This is certainly not the spirit of Greece that Shelley attempts to revive.⁹⁹

It is Ahasuerus who embodies Shelley's most penetrating historical insights. The figure of the Wandering Jew exerts a special appeal for Shelley. The evolution of this figure parallels the development of Shelley's ideas concerning the mind and human history.¹⁰⁰ In an early fragment entitled 'The Wandering Jew', he is portrayed as a wild sufferer, Paul. Later, in the reason-governed universe of *Queen Mab*, Ahasuerus delivers a fierce protest against the Christian God. In *Hellas*, Ahasuerus represents the historical wisdom that derives from suffering in a world which is fraught with confusion and uncertainty. Mahmud offers the best description of him: 'Thou severest clement from elements / Thy spirit is present in the Past, and sees / The birth of this old world through all its cycles / Of desolation and of loveliness' (ll. 744-7). Such wisdom is only obtainable through a participation in human suffering, not through detachment from human affairs. Imagination rather than reason presides over the process by which this wisdom is determined: 'The Future and the Past are idle shadows / Of thought's eternal flight--they have no being: / Nought is but that which feels itself to be' (ll. 783-5). Ahasuerus exhorts

⁹⁹ Woodring argues that the imagery of fire and sword used in the play suggests Shelley's realisation that pacifism is ineffectual and actions need to be undertaken (Woodring, p. 316). But I argue that the military imagery is used to prompt our reflection on the mutual destruction and utter futility of war, but not to promote a military campaign.

¹⁰⁰ The idea of the evolution of the Wandering Jew in Shelley's work is indebted to the fourth chapter of Neth's doctoral thesis, especially, pp 192-6, 205-6.

Mahmud in a rhetoric that recalls Jesus's sermon on the mount (Matthew, 7:7-8, see Wasserman, p. 393):

ask and have!
Knock and it shall be opened-look, and lo!
The coming age is shadowed on the Past
As on a glass (ll. 803-5).

Ahasuerus serves a role more positive and active than that of Demogorgon, in that the former gives shape to history as a result of his personal involvement whereas the latter remains outside human history.

Hellas, his last complete major work, represents the culmination of Shelley's view of history. The play places the idealism of *Prometheus Unbound* under a severe test. Mahmud's confrontation with Mahomet the Second is firmly grounded on historical fact, the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 known to Shelley through Gibbon (see Shelley's note, Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 479), unlike the confrontation between Prometheus and Jupiter (*Prometheus Unbound*, I, 191-210) which has its foundation in occult mythology. The scene in *Hellas* exemplifies Shelley's desire to stage a confrontation between past and present in order to apply the lessons of history to contemporary circumstances. This revisionary attitude towards the past also explains Shelley's admiration for and use of the Greek heritage. *Hellas* offers a psychological exploration of the optimism expressed in *Prometheus Unbound*. The cyclic view of history in *Hellas* is deprived of the certainty that is maintained by the seals and spells of Promethean virtues. As a consequence, the birth of a new Athens is beset by outbursts of violence and despair. A clear possible resolution is not in prospect. These dark visions in *Hellas* will be further explored in 'The Triumph of Life', a work centring on the pageant of history which shows a still deeper concern for the individuals involved in the historical process.

Shelley develops his theory of history out of an intellectual response to the 'master science' of the Enlightenment and also out of an immediate response to

contemporary political crises. The development of his theory begins with a view of history as linear and progressive, as the 'destined' onward progress delineated in *Queen Mab*. Shelley's optimism is nurtured by Godwin's vision of a perfectibility that accommodates both achievements and setbacks as integral aspects of an ultimately progressive pattern. However, this optimistic view was severely challenged by contemporary political events. *Prometheus Unbound* represents an idealistic resolution, upholding hope while confronting the possibility of despair. But *Hellas*, his last finished major work, presents an apparently opposite vision. The cyclic vision of history in *Hellas* suggests that the burden of the past outweighs any possibility of amelioration in the present. The Shelley of *Hellas* is absorbed by a historical pattern of decline and rebirth that is informed by Gibbon and the Hellenist writings, but his notion of rebirth differs significantly from both traditions. Shelley inherits from the Whig historians, most prominently Catherine Macaulay, a mission to redeem the past as a moral imperative. Shelley's vision of historical cycles is thus charged with a moral responsibility to stimulate and maintain a resilient hope in Liberty even in the face of mounting frustrations. This strong sense of moral responsibility diverts his attention from constructing a utopia removed from mortal cares like Prometheus's cave, to envisaging a wisdom that is gained through suffering as embodied by Ahasuerus in *Hellas*.

Shelley's historical vision as it develops from *Queen Mab* to *Hellas* involves an adjustment of his understanding of the role of poetry and art in the historical progress. Poetry does not only passively reflect the social environment from which it arises as in 'The Assassins', but more importantly it preserves humanity even at a time of retrogression as in *Hellas*. The spirit of freedom required and secured by poetry enables us to transgress the limits of our historical circumstances yet without erasing them. As a result, the highest ideal is protected from attainment and corruption. The modification parallels a development in the literary modes with which Shelley chooses to investigate

the problem of history. In a discursive mode, as in 'Reform' and 'Defence', Shelley examines the Godwinian pattern of the process of Liberty in its historical dimension. But his historical insights are more forcefully conveyed by a dramatic mode which allows different perspectives to participate in a confrontation with each other. In 'Charles the First' and 'The Masque of Anarchy', Shelley constructs a trope of 'historical invention' (Kucich, 'Inventing', pp. 138-9), that is, the pageant masque, to express his recognition that the struggle over historical interpretation is central to the struggle for political power. In *Laon and Cythna*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Hellas*, Shelley foregrounds the reading of past history as a phenomenological event, which compels the reader to confront past failures and successes within contemporary political circumstances. Shelley recognises that to read history is to participate in it, and this indicates that he is not so much concerned with constructing a coherent 'universal cyclic pattern' from a 'transcendent God-like position' as Wasserman argues (pp. 374, 395), as with the plight of individuals entangled in the continuous struggle for Liberty. Karl Kroeber's comment on *Hellas* still holds true: 'Shelley demonstrates history to be not an abstraction for intellectual analysis but a vital activity requiring from each of us emotional commitment, will, reason, and imagination'.¹⁰¹ Shelley's sympathy with suffering individuals on both sides of the struggle indicates the profoundly humanitarian basis on which he constructed historical visions that transcend partisanship, and yet are informed with an urgent moral anxiety to break free from the sterile cycle of hope and despair.

¹⁰¹ Karl Kroeber, *British Romantic Art* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986), p. 105.

Chapter Four: Shelley's Employment of Reverie

*As I lay asleep in Italy
There came a voice from over the Sea
And with great power it forth led me
To walk in the visions of Poesy.
'The Masque of Anarchy'*

In the Romantic period the dream vision became a more important poetic mode than it had been since the Medieval period. The Romantic poets inherited from the medieval tradition the self-conscious artistic framing of dream poems, but their use of the convention was various. Robert Southey used dream as a device by means of which poetry might once more accommodate the fantastic or the supernatural. Wordsworth and Coleridge, following Rousseau, privileged the state of reverie as a realm purer than ordinary daily consciousness, and located in it the source of inspiration and images. Keats was preoccupied with the distinction between the dreamer and the visionary poet. Shelley looked back to the biblical authority upon which the medieval dream poems heavily depended and diverted the psychic energy released in reverie to the service of the poet's social and historical responsibility. The liminal state of reverie, suspended between reality and imagination, between the world and the individual, enables Shelley to employ it not only as a framing device as in *Queen Mab*, but as a thematic structure which might accommodate a three-fold quest; for the primal unity of the self as in *Laon and Cythna*, for a language in which there was no distinction between the word and the idea as in *Prometheus Unbound*, and for a kind of poetry in which the poem would itself represent a political action, as in 'The Masque of Anarchy'. These three aims, especially the third, are closely related to Shelley's anxiety as an exile, seeking to overcome the psychological, linguistic and social alienations which are, inevitably, the exile's lot. Reverie enables him to cross these boundaries, but it also reveals a sense of guilt that prompts him to action.

Let us recollect our sensations as children . . . We less habitually distinguished all that we saw and felt from ourselves. They seemed as it were to constitute one mass. There are some persons who in this respect are always children. Those who are subject to the state called reverie feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being. They are conscious of no distinction. And these are states which precede or accompany or follow an unusually intense and vivid apprehension of life.

'Essay on Life' (SPP, p. 477).

Shelley's understanding of the term, 'reverie', seems to conform with Gaston Bachelard's distinction between 'dream', 'reverie', and 'vision'. For Shelley as well as for Bachelard, 'reverie' designates the psychological state in which the consciousness separates itself from its immediate environment and begins to work on a higher level, while the bodily sensations are laid asleep. Reverie leads one into vision. Reverie is thus distinct from 'dream', which designates a consciously inactive state.¹ The liberated consciousness in reverie generates a double perspective monitoring, as it were, the interaction between reality and imagination, between actualisation and potentiality, between self and the world. This liminal middle ground ensures the revitalisation of perceptions and feelings which are otherwise rendered insipid by the 'dreary intercourse of daily life' (Wordsworth, 'Tintern Abbey', l. 132). Reverie enables the dreamer to gain an access to, as Andrew Welburn terms it, the truth of imagination.² Reverie provides a sanctuary for the recuperation and rejuvenation of self by allowing the individual to recall the undifferentiated and unalienated unity between self and the world which we experience in infancy. This idea of a sanctuary-in-reverie suggests the influence of Rousseau's *Rêveries du*

¹ Gaston Bachelard holds that reverie occurs in the 'twilight' zone between clear thought and nocturnal dream. See *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language and the Cosmos*, trans., by Daniel Russell (Boston: Beacon, 1971), p. 10.

² Andrew Welburn, *The Truth of Imagination: An Introduction to Visionary Poetry* (New York: St. Martin, 1990).

promeneur solitaire. Rousseau centres the pleasure of reverie on the state of self-forgetting. In the seventh walk, he writes:

je ne médite, je ne rêve jamais plus délicieusement que quand je m'oublie moi-même. Je sens des extases, des ravissements inexprimables à me fondre pour ainsi dire dans le système des êtres, à m'identifier avec la nature entière (*Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. I, 1065-6).³

The absorption of self into nature offers not only a 'suspension des peines de la vie' (suspension of the pains of life) but a 'jouissance positive' (positive pleasure).⁴ Reverie as a psychological state offers Rousseau an access to his true self. More importantly, reverie offers an access to a 'self-circumscribing' and 'self-referential' mode of writing that allows him to enjoy the discovery of his true self.⁵ As Rousseau records his thought on one of the playing cards: 'ma vie entière n'a guère été qu'une longue rêverie divisée en chapitres par mes promenades de chaque jour.' (my entire life has been nothing but a long reverie divided in chapters by my daily walks, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. i, 1164). But it is this very self-circumscribing nature of reverie and the 'jouissance positive' which Rousseau celebrates that Shelley felt compelled to eschew. Shelley's employment of reverie renders it a preparatory stage of self-recuperation, but never a satisfying end in itself. Reverie prepares Shelley's heroes and heroines for a more severe confrontation with the world outside, a confrontation that impels them to accept their social and historical responsibilities.

³ 'My meditations and reveries are never more delightful than when I can forget myself. I feel transports of joy and inexpressible raptures in becoming fused as it were with the great system of beings and identifying myself with the whole of nature'. The English translation of *Les rêveries* are from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. by Peter France (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 111. Bachelard also stresses that poetic reverie leads to an expansion of the consciousness, in which the senses are awakened and the force of coherence reigns. (Bachelard, p. 6).

⁴ Rousseau recorded his thoughts during the walks in the country on a deck of playing cards. These two particular phrases are not normally included in the *Rêveries*, but appear under the section of 'Ébauches des Rêveries', *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. i, 1169. The English translations are my own.

⁵ Francis Mariner argues that not until the composition of *Reveries* did Rousseau succeed in cultivating a mode of writing that best suited his autobiographical intention. See Francis Mariner, 'From Portraiture to Reverie: Rousseau's Autobiographical Framing', *South Atlantic Review*, (January 1992), vol. 57, no. 1, 15-31, p. 28.

The early work, *Queen Mab*, draws for its framing device on the conventions of dream vision inherited from Edward Young and Robert Southey. The dependence on Young and Southey reveals Shelley's covert recognition of imagination rather than reason as the prime agent of universal amelioration, but the implications carried by the poem's frame remain incongruous with its content. In *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley breaks free from the cumbersome conventions of dream vision and delves into his protagonists' psyche. Laon and Cythna separately endure periods of captivity during which they sink into reveries through which they are forced into a confrontation with the malevolent forces within their own psyche, and hence prepared to undertake the historical role that they will share. In relating their dreams, they transmit their experience as an example for the narrator, who is himself a dreamer rising from the 'brief dream' of the French Revolution's 'unremaining glory' (I, i). The motive force of dream-narration and interpretation is further explored in *Prometheus Unbound*. The dreams of Asia and of Panthea function as the dynamic motor of the entire play. The re-creation of their forgotten dreams by Asia's intuitive reading of Panthea's dream serves as a model for our reading of the play, which is to be taken as a forgotten dream itself in need of re-creation. The dream-reading and the play-reading present themselves both as phenomenological events, prior to linguistic mediation. The emphasis on the phenomenological and pre-linguistic nature of reverie is utilised to direct the energy preserved and revitalised by reverie towards the acceptance of historical and social responsibilities. In 'The Masque of Anarchy', Shelley speaks, with the biblical authority inherent in the convention of dream vision, to his fellow country men and women, who have 'slumber[ed]' like lions. The convention of being inspired in sleep to prophesy also reveals Shelley's anxiety in exile to wake to action not only himself but the whole nation. The anxiety of exile finally turns him away from Rousseauan indulgence in reverie to a Dantean vision of history set within a cosmic perspective.

*Some say that gleams of a remoter world
Visit the soul in sleep,—that death is slumber,
And that its shapes the busy thoughts outnumber
Of those who wake and live.
'Mont Blanc' (ll. 49-52).*

In *Queen Mab* Shelley employs dream as a basis to launch his protest against corruption in present society and as a frame to contain his picture of a future utopia. As Stuart Curran and Kelvin Everest point out, the possible sources for the dream vision in *Queen Mab* include Edward Young's 'Night Thoughts' and Robert Southey's 'Vision of the Maid of Orleans' (originally included as part of the 'Joan of Arc', 1795), both of which look back to medieval dream poems such as Langland's 'Piers Plowman'.⁶ The conventions of dream poetry offered Shelley several advantages: first, dream vision as an artistic framing device marks the beginning and end of the narrative and also marks the birth of the self-consciousness of the poet;⁷ second, dream often occurs at a time of crisis to selected persons; third, dream as a vehicle of fantasy transports the dreamer to a higher realm; fourth, dream vision often involves an authoritative figure, a 'potentia', offering guidance and wisdom.⁸ Shelley utilises these characteristics to advocate an Enlightenment belief in the eventual triumph of reason and liberty.

The dream vision begins with a division of Ianthe's spirit from her sleeping body. Such a division is possible only in dream and a reunion is necessary before she can wake. The division functions as a precondition for the vision of human history. Moreover, the untarnished spirit separates itself from the body which is subject to decay, and thus 'reassume[s]' its 'native dignity' (I, 136-7) in order to act as a guarantee of future amelioration. The chariot of the Fairy comes to Ianthe: 'Hark! whence that rushing sound? / 'Tis like the wondrous

⁶ Curran, *Annus*, p. 13; Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest ed., *The Poems of Shelley* (New York: Longman, 1989), vol. i, p. 268.

⁷ A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976), pp. 4-6.

⁸ See Paul Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), pp. 5-12.

strain / That round a lonely ruin swells . . . Behold the chariot of the Fairy Queen!' (I, 45-58). Ianthe is entitled to this 'meed of virtue' (I, 186) as one of 'the good and the sincere' whose 'resolute will' bursts the 'icy chains of custom' (I, 123-8). The Fairy Queen takes the Spirit of Ianthe to her palace, 'the Hall of Spells' (II, 42), which is located in the 'interminable wilderness / Of worlds' (I, 265). From this commanding point '[h]igh on an isolated pinnacle' (II, 253), the Spirit views the earth and its inhabitants '[i]n just perspective' (II, 250). After allowing her a glimpse of the future bliss of human beings in harmony with nature, the Fairy Queen exhorts her to return to Henry her lover, who 'waits to catch / Light, life and rapture' from her smile (IX, 210-1). The poem ends with the tableau in which Ianthe wakes, unified in body and soul, to find Henry beside her.

The reunion of Ianthe and Henry represents the first fruit of a universal reunion that is both the origin and the ultimate end of the universe in 'the great chain of Nature' (II, 107-8). The materialist philosophical ideas, drawn from Holbach and Godwin, and so on, seem to be at odds with the employment of dream vision. The iconoclastic epigrams from Lucretius and Voltaire explicitly highlight this contradiction, for Lucretius claims: 'First, because I teach great matters, and I go on to set minds free from the hard knots of superstition', and Voltaire exclaims: 'Ecrasez l'infame!' (Matthews and Everest, p. 269). Apparently, the literary means he chose subvert his rational end. The advantages offered by dream vision (that of magical transportation and prophetic authority) are counterbalanced by the apparent disadvantages of advocating superstition. As Currant notes, the models of dream vision that Shelley depended on, Young's didacticism and Southey's fantastic mechanism, both prove to be incompatible with his ideas (*Annus*, p. 32). The discrepancy between the literary mode and the philosophical ideas that it espouses

nevertheless reveals Shelley's latent reliance on imagination rather than on reason as the instrument of moral good.⁹

In his first major attempt at the epic enterprise, *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley displays a psychological understanding of his protagonists that is made possible by his treatment of dream vision. The magic qualities of dream in *Queen Mab* are subordinated in the epic to its psychological significance. In dream, Laon and Cythna confront both their own aggressive tendencies, and the aggression that their revolutionary activities are about to unleash. Their separate yet parallel recuperation through reverie enables each to achieve a unified concept of the self and prepares them for a complete union with each other and for their subsequent exertions. Reverie signals a state of mind at the centre of the epic narrative that is available for the reader to experience. In fact, the entire poem is framed as the waking dream of the narrator. It is through reverie that Shelley designs his challenge to the received notion of 'ethical purity' (Donovan, p. 90), for reverie offers an access to the psyche which allows him to highlight the sexual union between Laon and Cythna as the linchpin of their political enterprise, with the factor of their incestuous relationship close at the background.

Laon and Cythna undergo their recuperation in their separate but parallel reveries in captivity. The separation is significant, for only after they encounter the aggressive side of their own egos can they unite with each other. Their visionary encounters with the dark sides of their own nature differ in a manner that seems to correspond with their difference of gender. Laon has to recognise his sexual desire to possess Cythna so that his political revolt can transcend sheer rivalry with Othman. Cythna, as a woman, must endure the full force of patriarchal tyranny and recover from it. As a part of her struggle against

⁹ Monika Lee disagrees with Curran, and King-Hele by arguing that the discrepancy between the materialist philosophical ideas and the lyric mode does not signal a 'flaw', but rather an attempt to keep the ideals from reification and ossification. See Monika Lee, 'The Presence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the Work of Percy Bysshe Shelley', (doctoral dissertation, University of Western Ontario: 1992), especially, pp. 86-7, 114, 239.

patriarchal tyranny, she develops a language of her own, which has the power to inspire the mariners and their female companions to break the chains of their slavery. Cythna functions as an active agent of change, not merely a 'passive vehicle' of Laon like the Old Hermit. Their union in a ruin expands their separately integrated selves into a unity with the universe, a grand 'self-forgetting' which is akin to that Rousseau celebrates exultantly in his *Rêveries*. However, the aggression that their exertions have unleashed comes back to haunt them in the form of the Woman struck by pestilence. The overtly erotic quality of Laon's encounter with this Woman exposes the inexorable guilt that Laon and Cythna cannot escape. This nightmarish encounter is necessary in order to ensure that they will not remain content with a merely personal happiness, but will rather find in their dearly purchased union the strength to pursue once again their revolutionary endeavour.

Laon's first task in the process of self-reintegration is to acknowledge his sexual desire for Cythna. Shortly before her abduction, he has a dream in which they sit together at the 'threshold of a cave', 'to taste the joys which Nature gave' (III, ii). Cythna's 'pure and radiant self' endows the bare scene with 'intenser hues'. Laon discovers a change in himself: 'if I loved before, now love was agony' (III, iii). Their conversation is interrupted by 'stifled shrieks' arising from the 'cavern's secret depths'. In fear of danger, he bears Cythna away from the cave. From the 'gaping earth' come '[I]legions of foul and ghastly shapes, which hung / Upon [his] flight . . . They plucked at Cythna' (III, v). He wakes up to find their cottage surrounded by the tyrant's soldiers who have come to kidnap Cythna. In a fit of anger, Laon kills three of them. He himself is in turn arrested by other guards. In his captivity he has a hallucination in which he eats the dead body of Cythna while he is surrounded by three 'swarthy' corpses.

The series of three violent episodes lends itself to a Freudian reading. Laon's awareness of his own desire -- 'if I loved before, now love was agony' --

is soon challenged by the 'ghastly shapes' appearing from the 'gaping earth' (III, v). He takes Cythna in his 'sheltering bosom' and flees from the terror. The flying dream acts out his desire to possess Cythna.¹⁰ The dream uncannily anticipates the abduction of Cythna. Laon's frustrated libidinal energy, as Stuart Sperry argues, finds compensation in killing three of the soldiers, when Laon draws his 'small knife', and 'with one impulse, suddenly / All unaware three of their number slew' (III, x). In killing the tyrant's soldiers, Laon announces his rivalry with the tyrant for the possession of Cythna.¹¹

In his captivity, Laon suffers hallucinations which reflect his troubled conscience. On the fourth morning, he has a 'fearful sleep', in which he is visited by shapes emerging from within himself, who people his 'terrific trance': like 'a choir of devils, / Around me they involved a giddy dance; / *Legions* seemed gathering from the misty levels / Of Ocean' and 'All shapes like mine own self, hideously multiplied' (III, xxii, xxiii, my emphasis). Two visions follow. The first is as hideous as the previous hallucination, while in the second vision he is rescued by the Old Hermit, but experiences the rescue as a vision. In the first vision, one of the guards brings out four 'corpses bare', and hangs them on high 'by the entangled hair'. Three of them are swarthy, the fourth is fair. Laon takes the fourth, which has the shape of a woman though it is now the 'dwelling of the many-coloured worm', and draws her 'white and hollow cheek' to his 'dry lips':

what radiance did inform
Those *horny eyes*? . . .
Alas, alas! it seemed that Cythna's ghost
Laughed in those looks, and that the flesh was
warm
Within my teeth!--A whirlwind keen as frost
Then in its sinking gulfs my sickening spirit

¹⁰ The Freudian interpretation of the flying dream is suggested by Ulmer (p. 59) as an emission fantasy usually occurring to adolescent boys. See Sigmund Freud, 'The Interpretation of Dreams', *Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans., by James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1957), vol. v, 394.

¹¹ Stuart Sperry, 'The Sexual Theme in Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam*', *Journal of English and German Philology*, 82 (January 1983), 32-49, p. 41.

tossed (III, xxvi, my emphases).

The vivid details cumulatively establish the horror of performing, and recognising while performing, the act of cannibalism. This vision of cannibalism might be read as a sequel to the previous hallucination, which is related to the earlier flying dream. In the earlier flying dream, Laon takes Cythna away from the '[I]legions of foul and ghastly shapes', vomited from the 'gaping earth' (III, v). These 'legions' of shapes now reveal themselves as emerging from within himself, and are recognised as hideous multiplications or in Ulmer's words 'psychic personae', of himself (pp. 59-60). It emerges that he is attempting to protect Cythna not from others, but from his own desires. The vision of cannibalism further acts out his desire and guilt. Cythna's ghost laughing through the 'horny eyes' at him recalls her 'calm smile' before being taken away by the guards (III, viii, 1171-6). The physical act of eating the object of one's desire is a perverse kind of sexual act, which, according to Freud, signals the initial oral stage of psychosexual development, a stage characterised by a 'fusion of libido and aggression'.¹² The background of the act of cannibalism, with the other three 'stiff' and 'swarthy' corpses hung on high, implies the complex matrix that underlies Laon's desire. These three corpses represent the three soldiers whom he had earlier killed. As E. B. Murray rightly notes, this dream exposes the consequence of Laon's conflation of his aggression towards the soldiers with his passion for Cythna, for in murdering the three soldiers in order to protect Cythna, Laon also murders her.¹³ Their presence represents a wish-fulfilment of Laon's revenge, first to have the dead soldiers for potential food and second to have Cythna for himself alone while the dead soldiers, the proxies of Othman, are punished by being forced to watch. As Ulmer reads it, this fulfilment is exposed by the corpse of

¹² J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 55, see also Ulmer, p. 60, note 32.

¹³ E. B. Murray, "Elective Affinity" in *The Revolt of Islam*, *Journal of English and German Philology*, 69 (October 1968), 570-85, p. 573.

Cythna as Laon's 'internalisation' of the patriarchal concept of love as male appropriation of the female (p. 60). Cythna, as a corpse enjoyed by Laon, issues an indictment that forces Laon to confront his crime of homicide and the brutal nature of his desire to possess her. In the dream that he sees her limbs being offered as food, Laon feels himself 'tossed' in the 'sinking gulfs' of her eyes, which recalls the punishment meted out to the carnal sinners in the first circle of Dante's 'Inferno'. Only having confronted the direst consequences of his desire, an experience available only in dream, can he fully profit from the Old Hermit's nursing and encouragement. As Ulmer maintains, the absolution of Laon must come in two ways, a 'moral redemption' that results from a pacifism that leads him to release Othman, and a 'sexual redemption' that results from his final union with Cythna (pp. 58-9, 66). But the motif of cannibalism will arise again in Cythna's dream to be confronted as an expression of her desire for revenge, and in Laon's encounter with the Pestilence-stricken Woman where it expresses their common guilt at the instigation of bloodshed.

In her self-formation in reverie separate from Laon, Cythna goes through the entire gamut of violation and recuperation. Cythna is initiated into womanhood by a series of traumatic experiences, abduction and rape, incarceration and bereavement. These sufferings force her to outgrow a naive trust in the power of the spirit over the body, which had been the lesson taught by Laon. Upon her capture by Othman's soldiers, she wears a mien of 'exultation' and a 'calm smile', so bewildering that Laon thinks she is overpowered by some 'brainless ecstacy' (III, viii). Her initial understanding of her 'task' as the 'mistress' of 'willing chains' proves to be dangerously naïve. The actual experience of gaining sovereignty over herself is far more tortuous and harrowing. Rape, as an inhuman act, exerts its impact on both the victim and the perpetrator, but only Cythna is able to free herself from the experience. Othman violates her only at the cost of violating his own humanity.

Even when he saw her wondrous loveliness,
 One moment to great Nature's sacred power
 He bent, and was no longer passionless;
 But when he bade her to his secret bower
 Be borne, a loveless victim, and she tore
 Her locks in agony, and her words of flame
 And mightier looks *availed not*; then he bore
Again his *load* of slavery, and became
 A king, a heartless beast, a pageant and a name
 (VII, v, my emphases).

Othman refuses to yield to the compassion which Cythna inspires in him, and falls victim to his own tyrannical desire. His bestial lust overpowers the better part of himself and overpowers, if temporarily, the spiritual force that Cythna is able to rally. But after his bestial violence subsides, Cythna overpowers him in that he is afraid to confront the consequence of his violence. Cythna lies like a Spirit 'in fleshly chains', while '[s]truggling, aghast and pale the Tyrant fled away' (VII, vi).

Cythna is subsequently transported to an underwater cave and deprived of normal human contact. Her escorts, a 'green and wrinkled *eunuch*', a 'wretch from infancy / Made *dumb* by poison' (VII, viii, my emphases), represent the extreme attempt of patriarchal dominance that seeks to possess the female by denying it.¹⁴ As in the rape of Thetis in *Prometheus Unbound*, Jupiter appropriates Thetis by absorbing not only her body but her speech into his own sadistic exultation:¹⁵

And thou
 Ascend beside me, veiled in the light
 Of the desire which makes thee one with me,
 Thetis, bright image of Eternity!--
 When thou didst cry, 'Insufferable might!
 God! Spare me! I sustain not the quick flames,
 The penetrating presence; all my being,
 Like him whom the Numidian seps did thaw
 Into a dew with poison, is dissolved,

¹⁴ Ulmer further argues that the way in which Cythna is transported to the cave by the Ethiop amounts to a 'symbolic rape'. (Ulmer, p. 62).

¹⁵ Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi also notes the same pattern of male appropriation of the female in 'The Cenci', see Gelpi, *Shelley's Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity* (New York, Oxford: OUP, 1992), pp. 239, 242.

Sinking through its foundations' . . .
(III, i, 33-42).

The male appropriation of the female body and female speech in *Laon and Cythna* is finally counteracted by Cythna's regained subjectivity. The underwater cave in which the tyrant imprison her becomes a womb-like enclosure, where she experiences a new-birth, not only the birth of her child but the birth of her new self that is both cause and product of her gaining the power over a 'subtler language'.

In the underwater cave, the 'spacious cell', an 'hupaithric temple wide and high' stored with the 'deep's wealth' (VII, xii, xiii), Cythna suffers from fits of madness. She suffers hallucinations resembling those which had haunted Laon. She sees white clouds of noon in the 'blue heaven so beautiful and fair' become like

hosts of ghastly shadows hovering there;
And the sea-eagle looked a fiend, who bore
Thy [Laon's] mingled limbs for food! (VII, xv).

This violent reverie functions to exorcise the trauma of rape. The rape deprives both her and Othman of the possibility of developing a reciprocal relationship. This dream acts out perversely Cythna's strong desire to unite with her lover. In a similar manner to the distortion of Laon's desire, Cythna's desire is frustrated and distorted into cannibalism, expressing the fusion of libidinal energy and aggression. Laon's cannibalistic dream betrays his guilt in that he failed to protect Cythna, whereas Cythna's dream expresses a kind of reprimand as a consequence of the violence done to her by Othman due to Laon's failure. The similarity of their dreams, as Cronin notes, has a 'therapeutic' effect by forcing them to acknowledge the consequences of their desire for each other (Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, pp. 103-4). In a similar manner, they need also to confront the larger consequences of their revolutionary enterprise.

Cythna's delivery of her child is experienced like a dream:

Another frenzy came--there seemed a being
 Within me--a strange *load* my heart did bear,
 As if some living thing had made its lair
 Even in the *fountains* of my life--a long
 And wonderous vision wrought from my despair,

...
 Methought, after a lapse of lingering pain,
 I saw that lovely shape, which near my heart
 had lain . . . (VII, xvi, xvii, my emphases).

The child, the result of the rape, needs to be re-conceived as the child of Cythna, as Othman's 'load of slavery' is transformed into the 'load' on Cythna's heart. The child is to the mother a 'dream divine' (VII, xviii). The two develop a community all by themselves, communicating with each other without the mediation of language:

Methought her looks began to talk with me;
 And no articulate sounds, but something sweet
 Her lips would frame, . . .
 . . . her touch would meet
 Mine, and our pulses calmly flow and beat
 In response while we slept; . . . (VII, xxi).

Together the two find happiness in the 'strange retreat', playing with shells, '[b]oth infants, weaving wings for time's perpetual way' (VII, xxi). Her nursing of the baby gives her strength to recover but it also fills her with an infant joy from which she needs to wean herself. After the child is stolen from her by Othman's diver, Cythna relapses into madness. It is her capacity for charity (in rescuing a nautilus from an eagle) that rouses her from her stifling woes and gives her 'human strength'. She resumes her 'ancient powers' and proclaims her victory over captivity by turning the prison into a 'refuge' (VII, xxviii).

The act of charity engenders a power that enables Cythna to develop her infantile curiosity (VI, xx) into a transforming creativity.

My mind became the book through which I grew
 Wise in all human wisdom, and its cave,
 Which like a mine I rifled through and through

To me the keeping of its secrets gave
One mind, the type of all, . . . (VII, xxxi).

The wisdom of the 'One mind' allows her to create, as it were, a system of signs which achieves an immediate unity between signs and what they signify.

And on the sand would I make signs to range
These woofs, as they were woven, of my thought;
Clear, elemental shapes, whose smallest change
A subtler language within language wrought
(VII, xxxii).

These signs woven of her thought constitute a story of the birth of language from nature (Ulmer, p. 67). In addition to a quasi-anthropological account of the genesis of language, the development of Cythna's 'subtler language' in the underwater cave, bears a special significance. Its particular locale suggests an insight into human creativity which resembles Julia Kristeva's. Kristeva's influential study, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, develops Lacan's theory of the mirror stage in the subject-formation of the infant in seeing the system of signification as constituted by signs, the 'voice' projected from the agitated body (from the semiotic chora) onto the facing imago or onto the object.¹⁶ Art (and poetic language), in its original context, when it offers the means to re-enact the primitive rite of sacrifice, represents a 'semiotization of the symbolic', and by reproducing signifiers, enables the subject to cross the borders of the symbolic and reach the mobile and provisional state of the 'semiotic chora', which evokes the condition of the womb (Kristeva, pp. 79, 25). The development of Cythna's 'subtler language' in the cave-prison suggests a crossing over the border of the symbolic order established by patriarchy and a return to the 'chora', in order to produce a language entirely of her own, a language that is able to articulate her woe and finally to bring about her

¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans., by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), p. 46.

freedom.¹⁷ The birth of this language also marks her maturing into her own womanhood.

Her power to wield the subtler language enables her to transform the cave into a study in which she investigates the course of history: 'And thus my prison was the populous earth' (VII, xxxv), and envisages the ultimate victory of truth, freedom and love. Her triumph over incarceration and madness charges her language, which had been mere rhetoric, with an invincible power to awaken the mariners and their female companions to their own abject slavery and to rebel against tyranny.

After recuperating, Laon and Cythna carry on their revolutionary tasks separately. They unite only when the revolutionary project has been defeated. Cythna rescues Laon from the tyrant's troops and her black Tartarian horse carries them to a ruinous cell. They talk about their shared passion for liberty, as 'Oblivion wrapped / [their] spirits, and the *fearful overthrow* / Of public hope was from [their] being snapped' (VI, xxx, my emphases). Their union grants them a temporary relief from their public responsibility. The conversation and consummation take place within a tender natural landscape, the 'faint and pallid lustre' of a meteor and the rustles of the leaves (VI, xxxii). Laon's narration of the scene is characterised by an intense attention to responsiveness and reciprocity: 'the thick ties / Of her soft hair, which bent with gathered weight / My neck near hers'. After the meteor leaves them a still 'interval', he felt 'the blood that burned / Within her frame, mingle with mine, and fall / Around my heart like fire' (VI, xxxiv). The union corrects the violation and appropriation that Cythna suffered from the rape. At this moment, theirs is 'the sickness of a deep / And speechless swoon of joy, as might befall / Two disunited spirits when they leap / In union from this earth's

¹⁷ Michael Payne offers an explanation of the chora: 'a nourishing and maternal, pre-verbal semiotic space or state in which the linguistic sign has not yet been articulated as the absence of an object; the space or state in which the speaking subject is form'. See Michael Payne, *Reading Theory: An Introduction to Lacan, Derrida, and Kristeva* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993), appendix, p. 239.

obscure and fading sleep' (VI, xxxiv). The reciprocal love between Laon and Cythna, which is itself the model of the universal harmony that they struggle to achieve through their revolutionary activities, offers the strongest foundation for their shared mission and destiny. But brutal reality finally intrudes into the scene of joy. Laon's incessant questionings force them to face their responsibility:

Was it one moment that confounded thus
All thought, all sense, all feeling, into one
Unutterable power, which *shielded* us
Even from *our own cold looks*, when we had gone
Into a wide and wild oblivion
Of tumult and of tenderness? or now
Had ages, such as make the moon and sun,
The seasons, and mankind their changes know,
Left fear and time unfelt by us alone below?
(VI, xxxv, my emphases).

They doubt their right to enjoy a private state of privileged bliss, and two more questions follow: '[w]hat are kisses. . .', and:

What is the strong control
Which leads the heart that dizzy steep to
climb,
Where far over the world those vapours roll,
Which blend two restless frames in one reposing
soul? (VI, xxxvi).

The questioning is not only a product of hindsight, for in the subsequent stanzas, Laon acknowledges the presence of the 'shadow which doth float unseen, / But not unfelt, o'er *blind* mortality'. When he wakes from his trance two days later, he comments: '[a]nd then I saw and felt' (VI, xxxvii). Their consummation for a time shields them not only from the unrest in the world outside but from their own 'cold looks', their guilty conscience and their awareness of the ephemerality of sexual enjoyment. In the consummation, they are awakened to an ecstasy but they are 'blind' to the commotion of the world at large, a commotion for which they are responsible.

Their troubled conscience presides in the form of 'cold looks' even over an erotic union that seems to celebrate the self-forgetfulness of each that comes through union with the other. The sense of guilt comes back to them in the form of the Woman stricken by Pestilence. As an 'antitype' of Cythna (Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, p. 106), the Woman comes to greet Laon as a reminder of the consequences of his action. Their encounter takes place when Laon sets out in search of food during a tempestuous night. He speeds across a desolate village, where 'Death and Fire had gorged the spoil of victory' (VI, xlv). Around the fountain in the market-place, he sees 'corpses stare / With *horny eyes* upon each other's face' (VI, xlvii, my emphases). He meets a woman withered to the shape of a fiend by 'some strange misery':

Soon as she heard my steps she leaped on me,
And glued her burning *lips* to mine, and *laughed*
With a loud, long, and frantic laugh of glee,
And cried, 'Now, Mortal, thou hast deeply
quaffed
The Plague's blue kisses-soon millions shall
pledge the draught! (VI, xlviii)

The explicitly sexual gestures recall his earlier hallucination, in which he ate Cythna's corpse. The frenetic laughter of the Woman also alludes to Cythna's ghost, whose laughter was swallowed up by the whirlwind. The Woman gathers three loaves from Famine, her paramour, and places a group of 'cold, stiff babes' in a ring as if to arrange a feast (VI, li). Laon, instead of 'rav[ing] in sympathy', takes the food and returns to Cythna. Throughout his journey, it is the memory of Cythna's looks that 'defeat[ed] / Despair' and sustains him (VI, lii).

As the vision of Cythna's ghost was 'dispersed' (III, xxvii) by the arrival of the Old Hermit, so the horror of Laon's encounter with the Woman is muffled by his embrace with Cythna on their 'bridal-couch' (VI, liv). After the meal, Cythna recovers. But her mien is described in a strangely ominous simile:

as an autumnal blossom
 Which spreads its shrunk leaves in the sunny
 air,
 After cold showers, like rainbows woven there,
 Thus in her *lips* and *cheeks* the vital spirit
 Mantled, . . . (VI, lv, my emphases)

Her healthy look is compared to an 'autumnal blossom' after 'cold showers', as if her appearance of health is only ephemeral and deceptive. The suggestion of death as a seductive womanly figure seems to confirm the connection between Cythna and the Woman as specular doubles, embodying Laon's sense of guilt at his instigation of general bloodshed, rather than, as Ulmer maintains, guilt at 'parricide' (Ulmer, p. 64).

The visionary encounter with the Woman, as a resurgence of guilt repressed in the course of erotic consummation, further exemplifies Shelley's attempt to push his protagonists beyond an originary unity (between subject and object, between male and female, between signifier and the signified), beyond, that is, the state of primary narcissism to which reverie offers access,¹⁸ and to find within reverie the motive power that impels Laon and Cythna to resume their political and social responsibilities. A quest to return to the state of primary narcissism is explored in *Alastor*. The Wandering Poet is driven by a desire for the veiled maid, not dissimilar to Laon's and Cythna's desire for each other, but his 'self-centred seclusion' seals his doom. His narcissistic tendency overpowers his other 'surpassing' qualities and drives him to an 'untimely death'. Laon and Cythna offer a corrective example to the Wandering Poet, in that they are compelled by their sense of historical responsibility to overcome their narcissistic impulses.

¹⁸ As Laplanche interprets him, Freud defines primary narcissism as a primitive state, characterised by the 'total absence of any relationship to the outside world, and by a lack of differentiation between ego and id; intra-uterine existence is taken to be its prototypical form, while sleep is deemed a more or less successful imitation of that ideal model'. Primary narcissism is regarded as a 'permanent structural feature of the subject, whereas 'secondary narcissism' designates the state of schizophrenic narcissism. See Laplanche, pp. 256, 337. For the idea of sleep as an imitation of primary narcissism, see Freud, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', in *Standard Edition*, vol. xviii, 130-31.

The example of Laon and Cythna suggests that Shelley objects to the self-contentment in reverie enjoyed and celebrated by Rousseau. On his fifth walk, Rousseau writes of his experience on the Isle of St Pierre:

là le bruit des vagues et l'agitation de l'eau fixant mes sens et chassant de mon âme toute autre agitation la plongeait dans une rêverie délicieuse . . . Le flux et reflux de cette eau, . . . suppléaient aux mouvements internes que la rêverie éteignait en moi et suffisaient pour me faire sentir avec plaisir mon existence sans prendre la peine de penser . . . (*Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. i, 1045).¹⁹

Rousseau has come to find the mode of autobiographical writing that best expresses his sense of being without agitating a desire to justify himself as in *The Confessions*, or to defend himself as in 'Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques'. The mode of reverie allows him freely to reflect on his own past, to anticipate a blissful future, and to enjoy a sense of existence that is in harmony with nature. The 'jouissance positive' of self-forgetting and self-absorption, regarded by Rousseau as the final achievement of his life, seems to have alarmed Shelley. Shelley, in his treatment of reverie in *Laon and Cythna*, vigorously repudiates the Rousseauian desire for a self-referential and self-circumscribing sense of existence by insisting on representing reverie as a stage of recuperation from which his protagonists must emerge, and take up once more their responsibilities in the world outside.

Laon and Cythna, as Cronin notes, represents one more of Shelley's attempts to combine the world of private imagination and the world of public events, the gap between which had seemed to the disillusioned English radicals, such as Coleridge and Wordsworth unbridgable (Cronin, *Poetic Thoughts*, p. 103). Reverie is central to Shelley's project for it offers a direct access to the psyche which is the generative motor of any social endeavour. It is through reverie that Laon and Cythna confront the repressed aspects of their

¹⁹ '[T]here the noise of the waves and the movement of the water, taking hold of my senses and driving all other agitation from my soul, would plunge it into a delicious reverie . . . it was enough to make me pleasantly aware of my existence, without troubling myself with thought' (Rousseau, *Reveries*, trans., by Peter France, pp. 86-7).

desires and are thus able to recuperate from the traumas of their divided self. Cythna's triumph over patriarchal appropriation, both of her body and of her speech, brings about a new kind of language that is adequate to articulate her woes and powerful enough to awaken in others a desire for liberty. Although Cythna's story is 'bracketed' within Laon's, her role cannot be reduced to the 'secondary' status accorded by Ulmer (pp. 70-1). Ulmer argues that Shelley fails to transcend his interiorised patriarchy. The series of disguised hierarchical arrangements, spirit over body, male over female, elite over populace, betray Shelley's reactionary ideology. Ulmer's attempt to launch a 'relentless demystification' of Shelley's idealism, as O'Neill comments,²⁰ is largely convincing. But the portrait of Cythna triumphing over her delirium in captivity and her giving birth to a 'subtler language' entirely her own expresses Shelley's profoundest insight into the human psyche and his genuine interest in women's emancipation. It is in this sense that Cythna is the central agent of unification, and serves, as Carlos Baker maintains, as a kind of 'matrix of revolution'.²¹ It is in this sense that Cythna rather than Laon provides the more powerful exemplary figure for the narrator in his attempt to awaken from the 'visions of despair' (I, i).

Cythna's and Laon's parallel reveries function in the epic as the dynamic of revolution. A similar parallel structure of reverie is elaborated in the lyrical drama, *Prometheus Unbound*. Asia's and Panthea's dreams generate in the process of their interpretation the dynamic on which the action of the entire play depends. Their dreams are underscored by an awakening of sexual desire, for Panthea's and Asia's visionary encounters with Prometheus recall Psyche's encounter with Eros. It is a desire free from the self-secluded narcissism that dooms the Wandering Poet to an untimely death in *Alastor*, for it prompts Asia

²⁰ Michael O'Neill, ed., *Shelley* (London: Longman, 1993), p. 16.

²¹ Carlos Baker, *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1948), p. 81.

to undertake the quest for a reunion with Prometheus, which is the prelude to, and the climax of, a universal regeneration. The reading of their dreams assumes a phenomenological quality transcending verbal communication. The interaction between Asia and Panthea serves as an ideal model for the relationship between the play and the reader. This ideal model has its counterpart in Asia's encounter with Demogorgon. In spite of and because of its nature that defeats the mode of dialogue, the encounter helps Asia to complete her self-understanding. The contrast between these two interpretative interludes (Rajan, *Supplement*, p. 321) is in accord with a revised Zoroastrian mechanism, which requires our 'interweaving' of the dual structure of the 'two worlds of life and death'. The entire play might thus be read as a dream now forgotten, that needs to be returned to our consciousness.

Asia's and Panthea's dreams in the second act of the play complement each other. Panthea's arrival in the Indian vale is preluded by the arrival of the spring, which comes as 'the memory of a dream, / Which now is sad because it hath been sweet' (II, i, 8-9). Panthea carries with her the memory of two dreams, one of which she has forgotten. In her first dream, her role is as a proxy of Asia in a visionary consummation with Prometheus. In this dream, Prometheus is transfigured as his 'wound-worn limbs' fall from him to reveal that he is 'unchanged within'. He speaks to Panthea: 'Sister of her whose footsteps pave the world / With loveliness . . . lift thine eyes on me' (II, i, 68-70). An atmosphere emanating from Prometheus's 'immortal shape' 'wrapped' her in its 'all-dissolving power'. Panthea describes her ecstasy in an analogy with the natural cycle of evaporation and condensation:

I saw not--heard not--moved not--only felt
 His presence flow and mingle through my blood
 Till it became *his* life, *and his* grew *mine*,
 And I was thus absorbed--until it past,
 And like the vapours when the sun sinks down,
 Gathering again in drops upon the pines
 And tremulous as they, in the deep night

My being was condensed, . . .
(II, i, 79-86, my emphases).

This picture of consummation is depicted from a female point of view yet is characterised by a constant attention to inter-permeation between the two sexes. The emphasis on mutual ecstasy is made clear by a previous anticipation of their union. Near the end of the first act, Prometheus remembers Asia with an intense longing: 'Asia! who, when my being overflowed / Wert like a golden chalice to bright wine / Which else had sunk into the thirsty dust' (I, 809-811). The role of Asia as a 'golden chalice' to the overflowing male energy runs the risk of patriarchal subordination of the female, but the allusion to the Eucharist nevertheless reveals the crucial interdependence between men and women. Shelley attempts to release sexuality from the vigilant sense of guilt that hovers over the scene of consummation in *Laon and Cythna* by placing it at the centre of a process of universal integration and regeneration. The complementary dreams of consummation prefigure the blissful life in Prometheus's cave, in that they provide a model of sexual relationship built on, in Barbara Gelpi's words, the 'exchange' of differences, a corrective model to the perverse 'appropriation' of Thetis by Jupiter (Gelpi, p. 236). Panthea's vision of union, depicted in the cyclic metaphors of dew and water vapour, prefigures the epithalamia of the Earth and the Moon in the fourth act, which highlights the marriage of contraries (to draw an alchemical analogy, see Abrams, *Supernaturalism*, p. 307) as the core of universal integration.

Panthea's narration of her first dream prompts Asia to remember her own dream, but Panthea's verbal account is only an obstacle for Asia's experience: 'Thou speakest, but thy words / Are as the air: I feel them not. . . . oh, lift / Thine eyes, that I may read his written soul!' (II, i, 108-110). Through Panthea's eyes, whose concentric structure is inwoven, 'orb within orb', Asia sees Prometheus 'arrayed / In the soft light of his own smiles'. Asia remembers

their promise to meet each other in the 'bright pavilion', built over the waste world. At this point when Asia understands the import of Panthea's dream, when 'The dream is told' (II, i, 126), a shape, 'a thing of air' supersedes the vision of Prometheus. The shape bids Asia: 'Follow! Follow!' and passes into Panthea's mind. Panthea begins to remember her second dream. It is a dream about the blossoms and leaves of an almond tree, which are blown down and stamped with the command: 'O FOLLOW, FOLLOW!' (II, i, 133-141).²² Panthea's second dream again fills Asia's own 'forgotten sleep' with 'shapes'. Asia thus recollects her visionary walks with Panthea when they encountered the same command written on every natural object. These four interlocking dreams, Panthea's dream of union, Asia's vision of Prometheus, Panthea's dream of an almond tree, and finally Asia's dream of walking with her sister, rapidly generate a dynamism which propels the stasis of the first act into movement. What triggers the rapid succession of dream after dream is a partial encounter with the object of one's desire, a longed-for fulfilment which galvanises, as it were, into life the forgotten desire to follow dreams. An explicit effect of the encounter is the awakening of Ione's sexuality, as she says to Panthea: 'I always knew what I desired before . . . But now I cannot tell thee what I seek; / I know not--something sweet, since it is sweet / Even to desire' (II, i, 95-9). This repetitive pattern of vision-and-quest is based on the paradigmatic encounter of Psyche and Eros.²³ However, Shelley attempts to avoid the pitfall which traps his protagonist in *Alastor* in which a visionary encounter with the veiled maid intensifies his narcissistic search for the 'bright shadow of that lovely dream' (l. 233), a search for a return to the infancy that

²² Wasserman points out that Panthea's dream of the almond tree, which in its Hebrew origin means 'hastening', alludes to Jeremiah (I, 11-2), where the prophet says: 'the word of the Lord came unto me . . . I will hasten my word to perform it'. Wasserman, pp. 309-10.

²³ The motif of the encounter of Psyche with Eros is prominent in the Romantic period. The encounter might be divided into three stages: a felt experience of 'lack', a pursuit of that which is 'beyond', and a recovery. For a detailed discussion of its treatment and variations, see Judith L. Harris, 'The Dark Encounter: the Figure of Psyche in Romantic Literature', (doctoral dissertation, George Washington University, 1993).

has nurtured him with a 'bright silver dream' (I, 67) and that leads inevitably to death. The Wandering Poet's 'return to infancy' proves to be regressive and destructive.²⁴ By contrast, Asia's encounter with Prometheus through Panthea's dream empowers her to leave her verdant vale to confront Demogorgon in the underworld and impels her to travel through infancy in order to bring about a 'diviner day' (II, v, 103).

Asia's insistence on reading Prometheus's 'written soul' through Panthea's eyes triggers the coming into being of the following dreams. Her dialogue with Panthea highlights the displacement of meaning onto reading (Rajan, *Supplement*, p. 307), in that Panthea's vision acquires meaning only as Asia reads it and reads it in a way transcending verbal communication. The interaction between Asia and Panthea 'recapitulates' the relationship between the play and the reader.²⁵ Prometheus's 'written soul' lends itself to a deconstructive reading in the sense that it works as a metaphor for the meaning of the play. Writing preserves the vision of Prometheus, but at the same time writing, being external, can only supplement the significance of the play. The supplementary nature of both writing and reading enables us to see Asia's reading of Prometheus's 'written soul' through Panthea's eyes as a phenomenological event which searches underneath the verbal surface for the 'unmediated' core of meaning (Rajan, *Supplement*, p. 308). Her intuitive reading re-articulates the 'voice unspoken' (II, i, 191), which Prometheus must bring to utterance in order to revoke the 'treasured spell' (I, 184).

Asia's dialogue with Panthea has its counterpart in Asia's encounter with Demogorgon, the 'mighty darkness' (II, iv, 2). She questions Demogorgon only to discover: 'So much I asked before, and my heart gave / The response thou hast given; and of such truths / Each to itself must be the oracle' (II, iv, 121-3).

²⁴ Andrew M. Cooper, *Doubt and Identity in Romantic Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988), p. 171.

²⁵ Stuart Curran, 'Shelley's Grasp upon the Actual', ed., *Approaches to Teaching Shelley's Poetry*, ed., Spencer Hall (New York: MLA, 1990), pp. 28-31, p. 30.

This realisation that Demogorgon functions not as an oracle but an echo of what Asia already knows completes her journey towards self-knowledge and thus fulfils her quest.

The contrast between Asia's dialogue with Panthea and Asia's encounter with Demogorgon highlights a Zoroastrian opposition that organises the entire play. It is a principle of specularity that eschews the symmetrical and static Manichaean opposition which Stuart Curran finds dominant in the play (Curran, *Annus*, pp. 44, 70-85). Shelley depicts a world, according to Zoroastrian belief, as divided into two, the world of the living and the world of the dead. The Earth Mother explains to Prometheus:

For know there are two worlds of life and
death;
One that which thou beholdest; but the other
Is underneath the grave, where do inhabit
The shadows of all forms that think and live
Till death unite them and they part no more;
(I, 195-9).

A mandate of unification is inscribed in the two-tiered structure of the world. As Rajan points out (Rajan, *Supplement*, p. 313, note), in the manuscript there is one cancelled line following line 195 which reads: 'Which thou henceforth art doomed to interweave'.²⁶ It is from the shadowy realm of the dead that Mother Earth conjures the phantom of Jupiter to re-pronounce the curse in order to revoke it. It is also from a similar realm of 'the dreams / Of human error's dense and purblind faith' (*Queen Mab*, VII, 63-4) that the Fairy Queen evokes the phantom of Ahasuerus to expose the falsehood of Christianity. The shadowy realm of dreams and death serves not only as a storehouse of used utterances and personae but more importantly as a depository of potentiality that will trigger change. This shadowy world finds another representation in the depth inhabited by Demogorgon and by Jupiter after his dethronement. The

²⁶ Lawrence John Zillman, ed., *Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound': A Variorum Edition* (Seattle: University of Washington P, 1959), p. 143.

only way to release the potentiality of this shadowy realm is to 'interweave' these two worlds, to bridge the gap between the signified and the signifier by a phenomenological reading beyond writing. This is a task that Prometheus, Asia, and the reader are 'doomed' to undertake.

Asia's search for an unmediated identity between signifier and signified, between narration of vision and vision itself, establishes the entire play as a phenomenological event, which requires the reader to experience the play for him(her) self in the form of a reverie and to interpret while envisaging it.

Shelley's employment of reverie as a psychological condition necessary to self-reintegration and as a phenomenological state necessary in order to arrive at meaning is given a political edge in 'The Masque of Anarchy'. The urgent need to speak to his fellow countrymen and women prompts him to adopt the mode of dream vision that immediately commands an authority similar to that of biblical prophecy. The convention of the poet speaking in dream from a remote land to his people in crisis reveals Shelley's anxiety concerning his own vocation and his exile. This poem shows Shelley attempting, like Keats in 'The Fall of Hyperion', to prove himself a visionary poet rather than a mere dreamer.

The poem presents Shelley's immediate response to the Peterloo massacre:

As I lay asleep in Italy
There came a voice from over the Sea,
And with great power it forth led me
To walk in the visions of Poesy (*ll.* 1-4).

The initial 'exilic leap'²⁷ from Italy back to England seeks to establish the ground of his protest. Speaking from his Italian exile, Shelley expresses a sense of guilt at his absence when his country most needed him and also a sense of powerlessness that his 'visions of Poesy' would have to travel across the Sea in order to reach his audience.

²⁷ Michael Seidel points out that 'exile' derives from 'ex' ('out of'), and the Latin root 'salire' ('to leap'), the same etymological root that produces 'exult'. See Michael Seidel, *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986), p. 1.

The convention of dream vision utilised in 'The Masque of Anarchy' invites a comparison with Keats's 'The Fall of Hyperion'. Keats attempts to prove himself one of the poet 'tribe', who has experienced '[w]hat 'tis to die and live again before / [his] fated hour' and thus is entitled to encounter Moneta ('The Fall of Hyperion', ll. 141-2).²⁸ Likewise, Shelley is urged by the historical event to prove himself not merely a 'dreaming thing', 'a fever of [himself]' ('The Fall of Hyperion', ll. 168-9). Both Keats's and Shelley's poems reveal an anxiety to distinguish between the dreamer and the visionary poet, an anxiety which is, as Karl Kroeber observes, symptomatic of the Romantic age which feels a widening gap between interior psychic power and external social efficacies.²⁹ To appease his anxiety, Shelley employs the mode of dream vision to stage a special kind of home-coming. His sleep-walking resorts to an authority like that of Daniel, Jeremiah and above all Dante, in order to inspire his people to hope, through a prophecy which is confounded with memory.

Shelley's insight into the realm of reverie is first and foremost morally oriented. Bachelard recalls Shelley when describing the state of reverie as opening up the possibility for a return to a lost unity:

Poetic reverie is a cosmic reverie. It is an opening to a beautiful world, to beautiful worlds. It gives the I a non-I which belongs to the I; my non-I. It is this 'my non-I' which enchants the I of the dreamer and which poets can help us share (Bachelard, p. 13)

This is the state of dissolution of the individual into the universe and of absorption of the universe into the individual that Shelley attributes to childhood vision and to those who retain the 'vivid apprehension' of childhood ('On Life', *SPP*, p. 477). But the perceptual, philosophical and moral advantages offered by reverie also pose dangers, for it may lead to the self-seclusion bordering on narcissism which leads the Wandering Poet to stasis and

²⁸ Quotations from Keats's poems are drawn from *John Keats: the Complete Poems*, ed., by Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1982).

²⁹ Karl Kroeber, 'Poem, Dream, and the Consuming of Culture', *The Georgia Review*, 32 (1978), 266-80, 273.

to death. Shelley is always cautious about the lure of reverie, especially the mode of reverie celebrated by Rousseau. Shelley vigorously eschews the Rousseauian 'jouissance positive'. He employs dream vision as a literary mode with explicit political import as in *Queen Mab*, and insistently seeks to force his protagonists to emerge from reverie to undertake their responsibility in the world at large as in *Laon and Cythna*, and *Prometheus Unbound*. 'The Masque of Anarchy' encapsulates his attempt to transform 'visions of Poesy' into a mode of political action by claiming the biblical authority of dream vision to exhort the people, like the dreamer at the beginning of *Laon and Cythna*, to wake from the 'visions of despair', and to '[r]ise like Lions after slumber' (l. 151).

Chapter Five: 'The Triumph of Life'

The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways of escape [from] suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognise who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

(trans., by William Weaver, London: Pan Books, 1979, pp. 126-7)

'The Triumph of Life', Shelley's last major piece of work, occupies a significant place in his career.¹ Both thematically and structurally, 'The Triumph of Life' (hereafter 'The Triumph') is the culmination of Shelley's explorations into poetry's role in history. The unfinished state of the poem has left critics divided between two opinions: one group sees the poem as a 'palinode' of Shelley's earlier idealism, another represents it as the 'culmination' of Shelley's former efforts.² This thesis seeks to prove both opinions inadequate by showing how in 'The Triumph' Shelley defines his own position by negotiating between the

¹ According to Reiman, the fragment was composed during the period from May to June 1822 in the Bay of Lerici. See Reiman, ed., *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, vol. i, *Peter Bell the Third and 'The Triumph of Life'* (New York and London: Garland, 1986), pp. 116-7.

² William Ulmer offers a summary of views of the poem (pp. 23-4, note 51). The first view is best exemplified by Bloom's argument that 'The Triumph' enacts the necessary 'defeat' of the myth (*Mythmaking*, p. 275). Views similar to that of Bloom are also articulated by Deconstructionists for different reasons: Paul de Man sees the poem as illustrating the impossibility of meaning; Hillis Miller reads it as figuring the triumph of language. See De Man, 'Shelley Disfigured', *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom, et al. (New York: Continuum, 1979), pp. 39-75; Miller, *The Linguistic Moment: From Wordsworth to Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985). On the other hand, G. H. Matthews believes that Shelley's poem, like Dante's, would have gone on to envision a Paradiso. See Matthews, 'On Shelley's "The Triumph of Life"', *Studia Neophilologica*, 34 (1962), 104-34, p. 105. Donald Reiman argues for an optimistic new vision that is suggested by the truncated ending of the manuscript, *Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life': A Critical Study* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1965), p. 83. He also maintains his opinion in *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts* (New York: Garland P, 1986), vol. i, 115. Michael Scrivener sees the poem as adumbrating an 'ethical idealism' dedicated to creating a society within which the ideal can prosper (p. 314). Tilottama Rajan sees 'The Triumph' as a culmination of Shelley's efforts and argues that the poem 'postpones' and 'relocates' Shelley's idealism rather than retracting it. Tilottama Rajan, 'Idealism and Scepticism', rpt. in *Shelley*, ed., by O'Neill, p. 243.

discourses of Western civilisation.

Shelley conducts his exploration through a densely-woven intertextual piece of writing, gathering materials not only from his predecessors and contemporaries, but more significantly from his own works. Dante's trilogy, *The Divine Comedy*, serves as the structural and thematic model for Shelley's poem, but the poem's allusions encompass a broad area of the literary tradition that Shelley inherited. The intertextual mode enables Shelley to develop his own vision in relation to those of his predecessors and contemporaries. It is a mode of representation that tactically foregrounds the process of interpretation. The intertextual quality of the poem enhances its dialogic structure, which sustains the evolving consciousness of the interlocutors in parallel reveries. By means of a dialogue between the poet and the composite character of Rousseau, himself a product of intertextuality, Shelley re-stages the master debate of his age, that is, that concerning the French Revolution, and examines it both in the larger context of historical process and in the recesses of the individual psyche. His examination assumes a form of active involvement in the torrents of history in order to expose both the nostalgic Apollonian longing for an unproblematic innocence and the destructive seductiveness of Dionysian frenzy, and to argue for a hope that can be sustained despite overwhelming disillusion. The parallel reveries appear to imply a cyclic pattern of history, but the staunch objection maintained by the poet to Rousseau underlines the poet's resistance to the threat that his own fate might simply be a repetition of Rousseau's. The apparently circular framework of the vision, which posits 'exile' as both the initial and the final state, actually suggests a 're-orienting' of Dante's trilogy in that Shelley's visionary poem begins with and ends in purgatory.³ Shelley, instead of denouncing his former optimism, questions it and vigorously maintains his hope by unflinchingly demanding that a spiritual purgatory be accepted as a moral duty.

³ The idea of 're-orienting' is indebted to Hogle, p. 27.

The dialogic and intertextual quality of the poem is emphatically dramatised in the confrontation between the interlocutors and forcefully thematised in their parallel reveries. As the poet and Rousseau define their own identities through a continuous interaction, their 'nested' visions⁴ question and answer each other to produce an unceasing modification of meaning and re-adjustment of perspectives. The result is a non-linear structure, but not a mere cyclic repetition, both in terms of time and space.

I. Vision as Remembrance

The parallel visions begin and apparently end in similar situations of retreat. The poem begins with the poet alienated, for 'untold' reasons, from a joyful morning amidst the Apennines. In the prologue, the morning celebration establishes a universal harmony.

And in succession due, did Continent,

Isle, Ocean, and all things that in them wear
The form and character of mortal mould
Rise as the Sun their father rose, to bear

Their portion of the toil which he of old
Took as his own and then imposed on them; . . .
(ll. 15-20).⁵

The universal celebration of dawn is portrayed in religious terms. The poet's alienated position represents an ironic reversal of this view of dawn.

before me fled
The night; behind me rose the day; the Deep

Was at my feet, and Heaven above my head

⁴ The phrase, 'nested visions', is indebted to Richard A. Isomaki, 'Shelley's Causal Themes', (doctoral dissertation, U of Washington, 1986), p. 216.

⁵ Quotations from 'The Triumph of Life' are from *SPP*. I have also consulted Donald H. Reiman, ed., *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, vol. i, *Peter Bell the Third and 'The Triumph of Life'* (New York and London: Garland, 1986); Reiman, ed., *Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": A Critical Study*, (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois P, 1965); G. M. Matthews, "'The Triumph of Life': A New Text", *Studia Neophilologica*, 32 (1960), 271-309.

When a strange trance over my fancy grew
Which was not slumber, . . .
. . . and I knew

That I had felt the freshness of that dawn,

And then a Vision on my brain was rolled. . . .
(*ll.* 26-40).

The promontory occupied by the poet, a vantage point recurrent in Shelley's poems, provides a spatial metaphor for the poet's isolation from joyful nature.⁶ His retreat, which might be understood as 'bardic necessity', initiates the subsequent vision. But the state of retreat is to be challenged and its significance changes during the course of the poem. His experience of déjà-vu shows the vision to be a remembrance of a past event and in a sense anticipates the parallel structure of the poet's and Rousseau's visions. The vision as remembrance evokes the authority of Dante whose vision is at once a memory and a prophecy.⁷ Rather than a repudiation of his former idealism, the opening section initiates the tone of honest inquiry that characterises the entire poem.⁸ The apparent opposition between the dawn and the poet's isolation, together with the apparent repetition of impressions, provides a fit prologue to the vision proper, in that it thematises a distinction between appearances and reality and challenges a deterministic cyclic view of history.

The main body of the poem is divided into five sections: the poet's vision of the procession (*ll.* 41-180), the poet's dialogue with Rousseau (*ll.* 180-308),

⁶ Reiman points out that the prologue is a parody of the prologue in *Faust*, and of Adam and Eve's morning prayer in *Paradise Lost* (IX, 192-9) (Reiman, *The Triumph*, p. 24 note). Bloom agrees with Yeats' suggestion that Shelley's description of the dawn represents a radical inversion of the conventional opposition between light and darkness in the manner of Blake (*Mythmaking*, p. 270). But what Shelley attempts to suggest by this estranged initial position is more than a simple inversion but a tentative and phenomenological re-working of the apparent opposition. For a detailed discussion of the different manuscript versions of the prologue and their significance, see Rajan, 'Idealism and Scepticism', rpt. in O'Neill, *Shelley*, p. 247.

⁷ Michael Seidel explains the myth of the underworld descent as offering the leader of a nation in diaspora an image of the future as prologue and granting him access to powers of utterance that are both memorial and prophetic, see Seidel, p. 13.

⁸ Robinson argues that this prologue shows Shelley's 'repudiation' of the optimism of Petrarch, Goethe and Calderón (p. 223). Brewer extends Robinson's view by claiming that 'The Triumph' repudiates Shelley's own idealism in *Prometheus Unbound* (p. 126). For Goethe's influence in the last stage of Shelley's life, see Webb, *The Violet*, pp. 145-173.

Rousseau's encounter with the Shape all light (*ll.* 308-434), Rousseau's vision of the procession (*ll.* 435-543) and the poet's truncated second dialogue with Rousseau (*ll.* 544-7). A series of repeated questions connects these sections. The first two sections serve as a pattern against which the subsequent movements are examined as apparent repetitions of their predecessors. The linear process of reading gives the poet's vision the authority of precedence but this authority is inevitably challenged by the chronological precedence of Rousseau's experience. Rousseau's vision mirrors the poet's in the sense that they share the same structure and dynamism. They differ in that in Rousseau's vision the frenzy of the procession is aggravated and the distinction between perception and reality is blurred. Rousseau's vision does not offer an answer to or amount to a cause of what is amiss in the poet's vision. It only presents a similar infernal vision which proves to be all the ghastlier for being a result of Rousseau's direct involvement in contrast with the poet's detachment hitherto. The similarities and differences of these two visions enable us to understand one in the light of the other, and to form our own critical understanding of the poet's rejection of Rousseau's lesson.

The poet's vision establishes the parameters of the poem's historical investigation and lays bare the implicit psychological tensions. The fabric of this vision, drawing materials from various sources, also foregrounds the intertextual and iconoclastic nature of Shelley's enterprise. The poet is isolated from the beginning--he satc beside a public way' (*l.* 43). His vision is divided into three parts: the 'great stream / Of people' (*l.* 44), the Car of Life, and the 'mighty captives' (*l.* 135) and the 'ribald crowd' (*l.* 136). The 'ribald crowd' is a repetition of the 'stream / Of people' but the former is now diagnosed as sharing a common malaise. They are again divided into two groups: the young who flee in the front and the old who follow at the rear of the Car. These sharp distinctions offer a framework within which the reader may examine the similarities beneath the apparent dissimilitude.

The poet sees the procession as characterised by blindness, sterility and profligacy. Energy is squandered without purpose. The public way is

Thick strewn with summer dust, and a great
stream
Of people there was hurrying to and fro
Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam,

All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know
Whither he went, or whence he came, or why
He made one of the multitude, yet so

Was borne amid the crowd as through the sky
One of the million leaves of summer's bier
(ll. 44-51).

The two epic similes, 'gnats' and 'leaves', immediately define the poem as a vision in the tradition of Dante and Milton. Shelley's differs from theirs in his jettisoning the orthodox theodicy that underpins their visions. Instead, Shelley seeks to locate a different cause of the fall from innocence by emphasising the 'melodious dew' of the fountains and the breeze from the forest which is ironically neglected in the pursuit of the 'serious folly as of old' (ll. 67-73). The effect is to suggest a different possibility of redemption.

The entropy of loss and blindness increases as the Car of Life approaches, whose advent frustrates the expectation of revelation, a function which its allusive build-up suggests but finally dismisses. The chariot comes issuing a 'cold glare', which obscures the sun as the sun obscures the stars. It brings with it a shadow of its own past: '[l]ike the young Moon . . . Her white shell trembles amid crimson air / And whilst the sleeping tempest gathers might / Doth, as a herald of its coming, bear / The ghost of her dead Mother' (ll. 79-84). The advent of the Car of Life presents an emblem of the iconoclastic nature of the poem. The chain of succession, the stars--the sun--the chariot, alludes to the hierarchical series in Petrarch's *Trionphi*.⁹ But the allusion works to parody

⁹ Petrarch's *Trionphi* moves from Love, to Chastity, Death, Fame, Time and finally to Eternity. Allan M. Weinberg points out that Shelley's 'The Triumph' encompasses the entire trajectory of Petrarch's poem, Weinberg, *Shelley's Italian Experience* (London Macmillan, 1991), p. 221. For Shelley's reading of Petrarch in September 1819, see Mary's

Petrarch, for the succession does not augur progress. In addition, the simultaneous appearance of the young Moon and the ghost of her dead Mother radically challenges ordinary perception which focuses on discrete and separable entities both in terms of time and space. Furthermore, the appearances of the Charioteer, the horseman and the coursers in their graphic details collapse the stock associations of divine revelation.

So came a chariot on the silent storm
Of its own rushing splendour, and a Shape
So sate within as one whom years deform

Beneath a dusky hood and double cape
Crouching within the shadow of a tomb,
And o'er what seemed the head a cloud like
crape

Was bent, a dun and faint ethereal gloom
Tempering the light; upon the chariot's beam
A Janus-visaged Shadow did assume

The guidance of that wonder-winged team.
The Shapes which drew it in thick lightnings
Were lost: I heard alone on the air's soft
stream

The music of their ever moving wings
(ll. 86-98).

The allusions to Daniel and Ezekiel, Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, work to reveal the truth that the Car of Life does not come to enforce an ultimate justice.¹⁰ By contrast, the Car shares the symptoms of loss and blindness which are pervasive in the crowd that surrounds it, rather than revealing the cause, not to mention the cure, of their malaise. The parody extends to a revaluation of Shelley's own earlier works in the mode of apocalyptic revelation, most forcefully the chariots in the fourth act of *Prometheus Unbound*.

Journal, i, 97. See also Robinson, pp. 225-31. But I argue that the more important structural model that Shelley's poem confronts is Dante's trilogy.

¹⁰ See Bryan Shelley, *Shelley and Scripture: the Interpreting Angel* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1994), p. 164, for biblical allusion of revelation (especially to the Book of Revelation). See Weinberg (p. 227) for allusions to Dante's triumph of the Griffin as an initiation into the Earthly paradise.

The only truth that the Car does reveal is the general enslavement of the crowd that surrounds it. The Car helps to establish a spatial division between the 'captive multitude'--those who precede and follow it-- and the 'mighty captives'--those who are enchained to it. The initially clear distinction between these two groups recalls Shelley's earlier treatment of the 'triumphal pageant' (l. 118) as in 'The Masque of Anarchy', 'Charles the First', and 'Peter Bell the Third'. The opposition in the earlier works, between royal pomp and ragged poverty, between oppressive lies and ugly reality, continues to dominate in 'The Triumph' but only to lay bare a truth which is as unpalatable as its opposite.

The motif of triumphal pageant in 'The Triumph' also offers a possibility for a third party, other than the pageant and its cheering crowd, to emerge. It preserves for the time being a place for the poet to contemplate the significance of the pageant without being involved in it. Furthermore, the poet's insight into the psychic basis of this general slavery shows an authority akin to that of Dante, which is lacking in the Juvenalian tradition of satire that Shelley's earlier representations of triumphal pageants depend on.¹¹ Dante's prophetic authority enables the poet to set himself apart in order to comment on both the panoramic view of history and the individual cases of wrongdoing. The double-edged investigation renders his observations all the more equivocal. The chariot enslaves:

All but the sacred few who could not tame
 Their spirits to the Conqueror, but as soon
 As they had touched the world with living flame

Fled back like eagles to their native noon,
 Or those who put aside the diadem
 Of earthly thrones or gems, till the last one

Were there; for they of Athens and Jerusalem
 Were neither mid the mighty captives seen
 Nor mid the ribald crowd that followed them . . .
 (ll. 128-136).

¹¹ Stevens E. Jones, *Satire*, p. 161. For Shelley's exploitations of Juvenalian satire, see also Holmes, p. 554.

The 'sacred few', including those who refuse to succumb to oppression and corruption and those who refuse earthly glory in the hope of gaining real wealth in heaven, are the only ones that escape the 'sad pageantry' of Life.¹² But their success in self-preservation is not positively approved, for they only flee back to their 'native noon' like eagles. Their flight from the world, like Tasso's, in Byron's 'Prophecy of Dante', is considered to be a 'recompense' (III, 165):

For, form'd of far too penetrable stuff,
These birds of Paradise but long to flee
Back to their native mansion: soon they find
Earth's mist with their pure pinions not agree,
And die or are degraded: . . . (III, 168-171).

The verbal parallel between Shelley's and Byron's poems, noted by Robinson (pp. 228-9), only suggests Shelley's attempt to distance himself from Byron's position, a position akin to his own while writing *Adonais*. But accepting unavoidable death as a recompense for ill fortune is one thing, taking flight from the disappointing world is another. Shelley's attitude towards the 'sacred few' is suspended between approval and regret, for, as Rajan comments, their flight is actually portrayed as 'Thel-like' (*Supplement*, p. 329). Their escape results from an excessive obsession with themselves and thus risks the danger of 'self-centred seclusion' and of the insanity from which the Maniac suffers in *Julian and Maddalo*.

The flight of the 'sacred few' is counterpointed by the 'ribald crowd' who 'fled' before and follow the Car of Life.

They, tortured by the agonising *pleasure*,
Convulsed and on the rapid whirlwinds spun
Of that fierce spirit, whose unholy *leisure*

Was soothed by mischief since the world begun,

¹² Reiman suggests that Socrates and Jesus are included in the 'sacred few' as representatives of the Hellenistic and Hebraic civilisations (*SPP*, p. 459, note 7). But I argue that the specific reference to Socrates, as Reiman contends, is not founded. For Socrates's suicide does not amount to an escape, but is an end as heroic as that of Milton, who Shelley lauds in *Adonais* as the 'Sire of an immortal strain' who went, 'unterrified, / Into the gulf of death' (*ll.* 30, 34-5).

...
Maidens and youths fling their wild arms in air
As their feet twinkle; now recede and now
Bending within each other's atmosphere

Kindle invisibly; and as they glow
Like moths by light attracted and repelled,
Oft to new bright destruction come and go,

Till like two clouds into one vale impelled
That shake the mountains when their lightnings
mingle
And die in rain,--the fiery band which held

Their natures, snaps . . . ere the shock cease
to tingle
One falls and then another in the path
Senseless, nor is the desolation single, . . .
(ll. 143-160, my emphases).

This passage well illustrates Shelley's mastery in terza rima, a rhyme scheme that he adopted from Dante and Byron and experimented with in several poems.

Shelley's deployment of enjambements, among other innovations, adds a sense of speed to the Italian rhyme scheme whose steady tercet structure provides a nobility and whose interlocking rhymes sustain attention to details.¹³ The rapid movement of the young lovers in the whirlwinds, recalling the episode of Francesca and Paolo in Dante's 'Inferno' (V), is metrically enacted by the sweeping and interlocking movement of the verse. The two contradictory similes, 'moths' and 'clouds', reveal a suspension of final judgement, for, as Rajan notes, the self-destruction of the moths is balanced by the 'generative' mingling of the clouds which results in rain, in contrast to the 'futile' flight to their 'native noon' of the 'sacred few' (*Supplement*, pp. 329-30). But the frenzy of passionate love leads to nothing short of 'desolation'. The desolation of the young lovers is mirrored with a difference by the desolation of the old men and women:

But not less with impotence of will

¹³ For a comparison between Byron's and Shelley's uses of terza rima, see Drummond, pp. 38-48. For a detailed discussion of the prosody in 'The Triumph', see Reiman, *The Triumph*, chapter three, and also Weinberg, pp. 207-9.

They wheel, though ghastly shadows interpose
Round them and round each other, and fulfil

Their work and to the dust whence they arose
Sink and corruption veils them as they lie--
And frost in these performs what fire in those
(ll. 170-5).

The picture of destruction caused by love is a ghastly contrast to the celebration of love in the fourth act of *Prometheus Unbound*.¹⁴ An entry in the manuscript suggests an explanation of the poem's apparently conflicting concerns with a re-assessment of historical characters and an investigation into the depth of the individual psyche. Between the passages describing young and old love, parts of some lyric poems are drafted.¹⁵ The juxtaposition of the epic vision and the lyric poem finds another parallel in a drafted line at the end of Rousseau's account of his story, which is deciphered by Reiman as 'Alas, I kiss you Julie' (Reiman, *The Triumph*, p. 211). The intertwined historical and personal concerns thematise the relationship between the poet and Rousseau and at the same time explain Shelley's highly personal choice of Rousseau as the guide in this Dantean dialogue.

In *Julian and Maddalo*, Shelley displays for the first time a mature employment of the dialogue form. Dialogue allows him to explore truth through a confrontation between different perspectives. Dialogue enacts a continuous process of inquiry, always modifying and adjusting, and exposes any resolution as no more than temporary. The indeterminacy in which dialogue results encourages the reader to take part, as it were, in an imaginary dialogue. In 'The Triumph', the use of dialogue is more sophisticated than in any other of Shelley's poems. Shelley utilises two models for his dialogue: the Rousseauan

¹⁴ Webb notes that this picture might derive from Shelley's translation of Goethe's 'Walpurgisnacht' (ll. 237-8) (Matthews, *Shelley*, p. 748), see Webb, *The Violet*, pp. 185-6.

¹⁵ Reiman points out that an extract from these passages was printed by Richard Garnett in *Macmillan's Magazine* and in *Relics of Shelley* under the title, 'Lines Written in the Bay of Lerici', and another in *Relics of Shelley* as 'Miscellaneous Fragment' XL. The latter was included in Hutchinson's Oxford edition as 'Fragment: to the Moon', which according to Matthews is actually the opening of the 'Lines'. Matthews conflates both under the title, 'Lines Written in the Bay of Lerici'. See Reiman, *The Triumph*, appendix D, p. 244.

model in which dialogue functions as a mode of self-defence and self-vindication, and the Dantean model in which a succession of guides instruct their pupils. The Dantean model, in which the reader accompanies Dante on his 'journey of interpretation',¹⁶ allows the process of reading Shelley's poem to work on two levels at once. One level is provided by the poet's and Rousseau's parallel reveries and the other by the narration of the reveries.¹⁷ The double perspective thus produced alerts the reader throughout to the process of interpretation. By engaging Rousseau in a dialogue, Shelley continues his experiment in *Alastor* and *Julian and Maddalo*, and attempts to advance on the inadequacy that he sees both in Rousseau's *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, which appeared between *Les confessions* and *Les rêveries* as Rousseau's final attempt to educate his readers, and in Byron's 'Prophecy of Dante', which remains a dramatic monologue. The grand dialogue with Rousseau in 'The Triumph' also reveals Shelley's vigorous engagement with the dominant cultural discourses of the modern period. Rousseau, a composite character in the poem, is endowed with characteristics of different cultural and historical personages, each one of whom reflects a different facet of Shelley's political, literary and personal concerns. However, the unfinished state of the poem makes it impossible to determine whether this results in a condemnation or a rehabilitation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.¹⁸

Rousseau in the Romantic age had become a site of contention even before Shelley began his engagement with him in the early days of 1811-2. The English reception of Rousseau before the French Revolution had been non-

¹⁶ William Franke, 'Dante's Hermeneutic Rite of Passage: "Inferno" 9', *Religion and Literature*, vol. 26, no. 2 (Summer 1994), 1-26, 10.

¹⁷ This idea of two-level reading is indebted to Valoria Tinckler-Villani, *Visions of Dante in English Poetry: Translations of 'The Commedia' from Jonathan Richardson to William Blake* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989). Tinckler-Villani argues that *The Commedia* engages the reader on two levels, one of the pilgrim's voyage and the other of the narration of the voyage, p. 20.

¹⁸ Rajan's earlier reading of 'The Triumph' in her *Dark Interpreter* argues that the poem is concerned with 'rehabilitating' Rousseau. Her later reading of the same poem in *The Supplement* allows both 'condemnation' and 'rehabilitation' without exclusively endorsing either. See *Supplement*, p. 325.

political, responding favourably to his advocacy of simple rural life as in the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (published in French in 1750, translated into English in 1751) and in the *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (published in French in 1758, translated into English in 1759), and admiring the noble sentiments of *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (published in French and translated into English in 1761).¹⁹ The appearance of *Émile* (1762) prompted Rousseau's flight from the Continent, but it was his arrival in England (1766) that dealt his reputation an irrevocable blow. The posthumous publication of *The Confessions* (1782, 1789) caused his reception to plummet in England because of the lurid details of his private life that it revealed. He was blamed for promoting by precept a cult of sensibility which paid undue attention to the individual self to an extent that was capable of unsettling society. But not until Edmund Burke identified Rousseau as the prime instigator of the regicidal French Revolution in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) was Rousseau considered directly with the Revolution. The conservative writers, such as Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge, for different reasons, later followed Burke's lead in holding Rousseau responsible for the Revolution (Duffy, pp. 38-9, 55-69). By contrast, the radical writers, such as William Godwin, and later William Hazlitt, Byron and Shelley, explored the potential political efficacy of the cult of sensibility to anchor and supplement Rousseau's political theory (Duffy, pp. 71-5). However, Shelley's interests in Rousseau go beyond his political alignment.

The earliest record of any comment by Shelley on Rousseau expresses his disapproval of *The Confessions* as either 'a disgrace to the confessor or a string of falsehoods' in a letter to Thomas Hogg (14 May, 1811, Jones, i, 70).²⁰ He

¹⁹ For a detailed study of Rousseau's reputation in England, see Edward Duffy, *Rousseau in England: the Context for Shelley's Critique of the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1979).

²⁰ A chronological list of Shelley's reading of Rousseau is offered by Monika Lee, 'The Presence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the Work of P. B. Shelley' (doctoral dissertation, U of Western Ontario, 1992), pp. 17-9.

even allied himself with the Burkean view by blaming Rousseau's writing for giving 'license' to 'passions that only incapacitate and contract the human heart:-so far hath he prepared the necks of his fellow-beings for that yoke of galling and dishonourable servitude, . . . it bears'.²¹ In *Queen Mab*, he cited Rousseau, without recognising the distinction between Rousseau and the Encyclopedists, to support his argument for atheism. But by the time he wrote *Alastor* and the series of the prose fragments, 'Speculations on Metaphysics' (1815), he had read *Rêveries* and had changed his former depreciatory attitude towards autobiographical writing. But his attitude towards the self-seclusion celebrated in *Rêveries* remained ambivalent. The summer in Geneva (1816) saw his attitude towards the writer of *Julie* transformed. He came to identify himself with Rousseau, whose mind, to Shelley, was so 'powerfully bright as to cast a shade of falsehood on the records that are called reality'. Shelley indeed identified himself with the poet Rousseau so fully that he 'refrained' from joining Byron in paying tribute to Gibbon during their visit to Gibbon's house at Lausanne (letter to Peacock, 12 July, 1816, Jones, i, 485-8). In a letter to Thomas Hogg (18 July, 1816, Jones, i, 493), Shelley praised the author of *Julie* as 'the greatest man the world has produced since Milton'. Later in 'A Philosophical View of Reform' and 'A Defence of Poetry', Shelley enlisted Rousseau as one of the sublime poets who continue age after age to re-vitalise the spirit of Liberty.²² Shelley assembles, as it were, all the different aspects of his responses to Rousseau in moulding the composite figure in 'The Triumph'. Rousseau's own intertwined life and writings, political and autobiographical, offer Shelley an authoritative model for his complex inquiry into the personal core of philosophical thinking and political commitment in an attempt to bridge the apparent gap between the private domain and the public sphere, to search

²¹ 'Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists' (1812), see Murray, *Prose*, p. 52..

²² In the 'Defence', Shelley's view of Rousseau appears to be divided between an appreciation of Rousseau as a poet of love in the line of Dante and a secondary admiration for Rousseau as a philosopher in company with Locke and Hume, Voltaire and Gibbon, see *SPP*, pp. 497, 502.

for a unity which will heal the rupture between the Shelley of the lyric poems, and Shelley in his political endeavours.

The configuration of Rousseau in 'The Triumph' reveals the complexity of Shelley's response to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the philosopher-poet-lover of the generation before the French Revolution, who is recognised as a compound precursor. Rousseau's blueprint for a civilisation modelled on a hypothetical natural state of equality and simplicity as in his three *Discourses* and the *Social Contract* offered a model for a new society that inspired Shelley and other English radicals, whereas the appeal to rural retreat, that attracted the conservatives, such as Wordsworth, was more problematic. But it is Rousseau's privileging of sensibility and ideal love over constricting social norms, as in *Julie*, and his daring exploration into the domain of his own psyche, that prompted an identification with Rousseau that is at once admiring and ashamed. The later Rousseau, contented in self-secluded reverie, provoked Shelley's angry recognition of the results of his own exile, and prompted Shelley to associate Rousseau with Wordsworth as an apostate.²³ For Shelley and for Rousseau himself, Rousseau's political philosophy is firmly based on himself as a poet-lover. It is in this way that Shelley portrays Rousseau as a Promethean figure destroying established oppression for the good of mankind. The Romantic poets understood the ambivalence of this figure of Prometheus as did Rousseau himself, as in the frontispiece to the 'Discours sur les sciences et les arts'. There he represents himself assuming two of Prometheus's roles: as the stealer of the fire and as the one who warns of the dangers of its use.²⁴ Furthermore, this figure finds another appropriate incarnation in the re-discovered Dante. By

²³ The similarities between Rousseau and Shelley are recognised by a relentless critic of Rousseau, Irving Babbitt, who regards Shelley as the 'most purely Rousseauistic' of the English Romantic poets. Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside, 1919), p. 82.

²⁴ The ambivalence of Rousseau's view of Prometheus is noted by Thomas Kavanagh, *Writing the Truth: Authority and Desire in Rousseau* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1987), p. 127, discussed by Monika Lee, p. 92.

1819, Dante's reputation in England had become established.²⁵ His popularity among the younger Romantic writers might reveal their desire to find an alternative to dominant native precursors, principally Milton (Tinckler-Villani, p. 10). Shelley shared the general Romantic response to Dante as offering the possibility of a new poetic style in the sharp visual qualities of his verse and in his incisive portrayals of historical characters (Tinckler-Villani, p. 18), and agreed with Byron's poignant identification with the exiled Dante.²⁶ But Shelley was well equipped to go beyond the Romantic preference for the infernal Dante.²⁷ Dante for Shelley was first and foremost a poet (the second epic poet in a line with Homer and Milton, and the lyric poet of the *Vita Nuova*) and an ardent inquirer, or in Shelley's own words, 'the first religious reformer', who brought the ancient world out of darkness into the modern like lightning.²⁸ He chose to neglect Dante's political belief in the unifying power of the Roman Empire in separation from the corrupt Church and Dante's Catholic faith (*SPP*, pp. 496-500).²⁹ Shelley had earlier experimented with Dante's style and imagery in *Epipsychidion* and *Adonais*.³⁰ In 'The Triumph', Shelley attempts to offer

²⁵ For a discussion of the sudden acclaim of Dante among the English Romantic writers in 1818-9, see Ralph Pite, *The Circle of Our Vision: Dante's Presence in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1994), p. 1.

²⁶ Steve Ellis maintains that the Romantic Dante is actually a tormented exile, a combination of a Byronic hero and of the idealist lover of *Vita Nuova*, as in 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage' (especially I, lxxxiv) and 'The Prophecy of Dante'. The Byronic model for reading Dante was popularised by Hazlitt, who sees Dante, like Milton's Satan, as sharing the Byronic hero's gloom and egotism. Ellis points out that the Romantic interest in the 'Inferno' is explicable because the 'Inferno' fitted most easily to the model of Byronic heroes. See Steve Ellis, *Dante and English Poetry: Shelley to T. S. Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983), pp. 44-6, 47, 58-9.

²⁷ Shelley translated two of Dante's sonnets, (one of which he published with *Alastor*), one canzone, and the Matilda passage from the 'Purgatorio'. He also helped Medwin to translate the Ugolino passage from the 'Inferno'. For Shelley's reading and translation of Dante, see Webb, *The Violet*, pp. 310-29.

²⁸ Hazlitt shared the same view as Shelley. Hazlitt wrote: 'Dante was the father of modern poetry . . . His poem is the first great step from Gothic darkness and barbarism; and the struggle of thought in it to burst the thralldom in which the human mind had been so long held, is felt in every page', 'On Poetry in General', *Complete Works*, vol. v, 17-8.

²⁹ As Ellis notes, the fundamental difference between Shelley and Dante is that for Dante practical politics and poetry are separate whereas for Shelley they should be indivisible. p. 27.

³⁰ Earl J. Schulze, 'The Dantean Quest of *Epipsychidion*', *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. xxi, no. 2 (Summer 1992), 191-216. For a detailed source-study of *Epipsychidion* and *Adonais*, see Thomas Hume Vance, 'Dante and Shelley', (doctoral dissertation, Yale U,

another order of vision that comprehends but adjusts the entire itinerary of Dante's trilogy. His engagement with Rousseau, via Dante, is thus expanded into an investigation of the psyche on a political and cultural, historical and cosmic scale.

Shelley uses dialogue as the means to mediate between contrary positions. Moreover, dialogue allows Shelley to disrupt his own paradigm of an ideal relationship between author and reader which he envisages in *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*. With this tense dialogue, Shelley also challenges Rousseau's paradigm of an ideal readership, which he gradually developed from the dialogue in the preface to *Julie* between an older man of letters (with identifiable traits of Voltaire) and the author, the amorous relationship in *Julie*, the tutor and pupil relationship in *Émile*, and the relationship between an enlightened reader, Rousseau, newly arrived in France from abroad, and a dogmatic reader, in *The Dialogues*.³¹ The presiding dialogic structure also recalls the dialogic structure within which Wordsworth's *Excursion* is organised. Shelley's poet still defiant at the end of 'The Triumph' seems designed to articulate the objections of the silenced Solitary to the reforming scheme of the Wanderer at the end of *The Excursion*. Moreover, the Dantean dialogue on which Shelley's poem is modelled provides a formula for a succession of guides. In the 'Inferno', Virgil a 'sub-author', is revered by the pilgrim, Dante, as an unchallengeable authority.³² But, Virgil gives way to Matilda in the 'Purgatorio'

1935). A comparison between *The Commedia* and *Prometheus Unbound* is documented in Lawrence John Zillman, ed., *Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound': A Variorum Edition* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1959), pp. 71-4. The presence of Dante in 'The Triumph' was first detected by A. C. Bradley, 'Notes on Shelley's "Triumph of Life"', *Modern Language Review*, 9 (1914), 441-56, and most forcefully insisted on by T. S. Eliot, 'What Dante Means to Me' in *To Criticise the Critic* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), pp. 127-132.

³¹ For the evolution of the ideal readership in Rousseau's works, see Francis Mariner, 'From Portraiture to Reverie: Rousseau's Autobiographical Framing', *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 57, no. 1 (January 1992), pp. 15-31; Christopher Kelly and Roger D. Masters, 'Rousseau on Reading "Jean-Jacques": *The Dialogues*', *Interpretation*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Winter 1989-90), 239-53.

³² Robin Kilpatrick, *Dante's 'Inferno': Difficulty and Dead Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), pp. 10-11.

and Matilda gives way to Beatrice in the 'Paradiso'.

The voices in the dialogue between Rousseau and the poet employ two different registers. Rousseau speaks from the position that he occupied historically in *The Confessions*, in a voice of self-defence and self-vindication. By contrast, the poet's response to Rousseau recalls Shelley's vehement response to the Wordsworth of *The Excursion*, a work in celebration of retreat comparable not to *The Confessions* but to *Rêveries*. The serene tone of *Rêveries* is evoked in Rousseau's recollection of the supposedly earliest segment of his life, that is, his reverie in the vale of April prime, but not in Rousseau's dialogue with the poet. A deliberate confusion of voices emanating from different temporal and textual orders reveals Shelley's anxiety to engage himself with both the Rousseau of *The Confessions*, who is ambivalently admirable, and the Rousseau of *Rêveries*, who is more decidedly objectionable, because of his association with Wordsworth.³³ The serene tone of Rousseau from *Rêveries* instigates the poet's uncompromising defiance at the end of Rousseau's narrative.

The encounter between the poet and Rousseau, following the Dantean convention, occurs at a time of crisis. Increasingly disheartened by the 'sad pageantry', the poet cries out: 'what is this?', 'whose shape is that within the car?', and 'why . . . is all here amiss? (ll. 177-9). Before the third question is finished, Rousseau answers: 'Life', an all-encompassing answer to the poet's sequence of lucid questions. Their encounter evolves as a ghastly opposite to

³³ Shelley's association of Rousseau with Wordsworth suggests an understanding of the egotism of both, which is shared with Hazlitt. Hazlitt writes: 'it was the excess of [Rousseau's] egotism and his utter blindness to everything else, that found a corresponding sympathy in the conscious feelings of every human breast, and shattered to pieces the pride of rank and circumstance by the pride of internal worth or upstart pretension'. *The Complete Works*, xi, 278. Hazlitt discerns Wordsworth's strength and weakness similarly in his review of *The Excursion*: 'The common and the permanent, like the Platonic ideas, are his only realities. . . . An intense intellectual egotism swallows up every thing. . . . The power of his mind preys upon itself. It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe, *The Examiner*, (21-28 August, 1814), pp. 541-2.

the encounter between the wandering poet and the veiled maid in *Alastor*.

I turned and *knew*
(O Heaven have mercy on such wretchedness!)

That what I thought was an *old root* which grew
To strange distortion out of the hill side
Was indeed one of that *deluded crew*,

And that the grass which methought hung so wide
And white, was but his thin discoloured hair,
And that the holes it vainly sought to hide

Were or had been eyes.-- . . .
(*ll.* 180-8, my emphases).

The slow and tentative movement of the verse itself mimes the groping movement of the poet's eye, as he recognises Rousseau as if retrospectively, and as if the whole experience repeats some event in the past. This terrifying recollection may owe something to an experience recalled by Shelley in 1815 that gave him a 'thrilling horror'³⁴ The slow motion of the poet's eye as it tracks over the decayed face of Rousseau betrays his feeling of horror at confronting a casualty of the triumphal procession, 'one of the deluded crew'. In 'The Triumph', the sense of horror is aggravated, rather than alleviated, by Rousseau's suggestive command:

'If thou canst forbear
To join the dance, which I had well forborne,
Said the grim Feature, of my thought aware,

'I will tell all that which to this deep scorn
Led me and my companions, and relate
The progress of the pageant since the morn;

'If thirst of knowledge doth not thus abate,
Follow it even to the night, but I
Am weary' . . . (*ll.* 188-197).

³⁴ Shelley records his walk with a friend in the countryside of Oxford in the early winter of 1810. They were engaged in 'earnest and interesting conversation'. Shelley recollects: 'The scene surely was a common scene; the season and the hour little calculated to kindle lawless thought; . . . I suddenly remembered to have seen that exact scene in some dream of long--'. The fragment breaks off at this point and Shelley notes: 'Here I was obliged to leave off, overcome by thrilling horror.'. See 'Catalogue of the Phenomena of Dream, as Connecting Sleeping and Waking', in the 'Speculations on Metaphysics', Julian, V, 66-7.

This Death-figure, the 'grim Feature' recalling Death in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (X, 279), commands the poet to 'forbear' to join the dance as both the precondition and a desirable result of learning his lesson. The poet responds to this formidable figure by asking him to identify himself: 'First who art thou' (l. 199). Rousseau answers in a characteristically defensive manner, identifying himself with what he had been and should have continued to be, and with what he should have been but is not.

'Before thy memory

'I feared, loved, hated, suffered, did, and
died,
And if the spark with which Heaven lit my
spirit
Earth *had* with purer nutriment supplied

'Corruption would not now thus much inherit
Of what was once Rousseau--nor this disguise
Stain that within which still disdains to wear
it.--

'If I have been extinguished, yet there rise
A thousand beacons from the spark I bore.'--
(ll. 199-207, my emphases).

This self-identification by means of multiple negations sets the tone of Rousseau's self-vindication throughout the dialogue. The trope for his spirit, the 'spark', reveals his attempt to claim kinship with Prometheus, as a still unrepentant Titan. This posturing enables him to initiate the poet into the secret of Life. Rousseau's self-vindication which is also self-loathing completes the portrait of a visionary manqué, and also anticipates his own ambivalence towards some of the characters whom they are about to encounter.

First of all, the poet asks about the 'mighty captives', those who are chained to the Car. According to Rousseau, this group includes all rulers (either over thought, as philosophers and sages, or over men, as monarchs). Their sin is not having known themselves so that they lack the might to 'repress' their 'mutiny within'. Their self-deception leads them to feign a 'morn of truth' which only

ushers in a 'deep night' even before evening (*ll.* 208-14).

Among these 'mighty captives', Napoleon first catches the poet's attention: 'Who is he with chin / Upon his breast and hands crost on his chain?' (*ll.* 215-6).³⁵ This is the only character in the procession who is described in graphic detail, a special treatment that puts him almost on an equal footing with the poet and Rousseau. Rousseau's diagnosis of Napoleon's fall is reminiscent of the Preacher in *Eccelesiastes*. Napoleon, 'the Child of a fierce hour', sought to win the world only to lose 'all it did contain / Of greatness', and fell like other climbers before him (*ll.* 217-224). The poet's response is almost physical:

I felt my cheek
Alter to see the great form pass away
Whose grasp had left the giant world so weak

That every pigmy kicked it as it lay--
(*ll.* 224-7).

The fall of Napoleon once again proves the irreconcilability of good and 'the means of good' that lies, as Shelley had insisted in *Prometheus Unbound*, at the heart of the French Revolution. Shelley announces a regret shared by his age. Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* passes his verdict on this damaged hero:

Conqueror and captive of the earth art thou!
She trembles at thee still . . .
That thou art nothing, save the jest of Fame,
.
An empire thou couldst crush, . . .
But govern not thy pettiest passion, nor, . . .
Look through thine own, nor curb the lust of
war, . . . ' (*III*, xxxvii-xxxviii).

Napoleon, for Byron, epitomises all the 'unquiet things', who 'once kindled, quenchless evermore, / Preys upon high adventure' (*III*, xxxvi-xliii). Shelley's judgement on Napoleon and on the other 'spoilers spoiled', a phrase indebted to Byron,³⁶ comes very close to Byron's view that deficient self-knowledge and

³⁵ The centrality given to Napoleon, as Reiman suggests, might be prompted by the pageant in London, 1815, which celebrated the defeat of Napoleon, (*SPP*, p. 458).

³⁶ In Byron's 'Prophecy of Dante', Dante refers to Rome as 'the spoiler or the spoil of France'

self-sovereignty is the cause of all evils. Shelley's portrayal of Napoleon as the first captive to the Car seems designed to counter Hazlitt's apology for Napoleon as the 'only alternative' to the slavery of monarchy. Hazlitt gave generous allowance to the circumstances of besieged France to excuse Napoleon's seizure of power.³⁷ By contrast, Shelley insists on seeing Napoleon as a slave to his own irrepressible ambition, which betrayed the French Revolution and wrecked the world. The poet in the 'The Triumph' expresses a note of lament and despair similar to that felt by Byron: 'for despair / I half disdained mine eye's desire to fill / With the spent vision of the times that were / And scarce have ceased to be . . .'. The poet is interrupted by Rousseau's command, 'Dost thou behold', which directs his attention to the following 'spoilers spoiled'.

The procession of the 'spoilers spoiled' expands the scope of investigation for they encompass rulers over empires and rulers over thought: the anarchs, Frederick the Great of Prussia, Catherine the Great of Russia, Leopold II of Tuscany; the demagogue, Voltaire; and the sage, Kant. Their political and philosophical achievements prove to be inadequate in the face of Life.³⁸ In

(II, 97), suggesting the mutual disaster of war. Shelley's phrase, 'spoilers spoiled', more emphatically compresses the agent and recipient of the action. Duffy notes another possible source for Shelley's phrase (p. 108). In a letter to Murray (20 May, 1820), Byron writes in the postscript: Cy [sic]-git [sic] l'enfant gâté and C.. Here lies the spoilt Child / Of the world which he spoil'd. The original is Grimm and Diderot & c. & c. & c.' See *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. vii, 103. The original version of the epitaph is as follows: 'Ci gît l'enfant gâté du monde qu'il gâta'. See Friedrich Melchior Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique, adressée à un souverain d'Allemagne*, 3 Parties, 16 tomes (Paris:Longchamps and F. Buisson, 1812-3), 2nd part, vol. iv, 355.

³⁷ Hazlitt, *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, in *The Complete Works*, vols. xiii, xiv, quotations are from vol. xiii, p. x.

³⁸ In the manuscript, the classification of these historical characters remains undecided. After line 227 (in the middle of the Napoleon passage), the characters are classified into groups, Plato with Aristotle; Bacon; Voltaire with Rousseau; and Wordsworth. This classification differs from the version decided by Reiman later in *SPP*. Reiman remarks that Rousseau tries to persuade the poet out of his disregard for Wordsworth, which is itself a symptom of disregarding the lesson of history. (Reiman, *The Triumph*, p. 241). But the ambiguous attributions of statements and descriptions do not endorse any definite interpretation. This undecidedness is also reflected in a graver issue, that is, whether the 'sacred few' are included in the procession. Mary's edition differs from Reiman's and preserves the ambiguity. For a lucid discussion of the ambiguous manuscript entries, see Rajan, *Supplement*, pp. 342-3.

Rousseau's opinion, they are all vanquished by the sole Conqueror, Life: 'For in the battle Life and they did wage / She remained conqueror' (ll. 239-40). By contrast, Rousseau assesses himself according to another criterion, that of the heart, for he is 'overcome / By [his] own heart alone, which neither age / Nor tears nor infamy nor now the tomb / Could temper to its object' (ll. 240-3).³⁹ This proud self-assertion points to the heart of the Romantic conception of Rousseau. As Thomas McFarland maintains, Rousseau turned the direction of literary effort towards self-revelation by formulating a new concept of the self.⁴⁰ This newly cultivated bold exploration carries with it an explosive political potential. Hazlitt comments:

[Rousseau] owed the power which he exercised over the opinions of all Europe, . . . and overturned established systems, to the tyranny which his feelings, in the first instance, exercised over himself. The dazzling blaze of his reputation was kindled by the fire that fed upon his vitals (iv, 88-9).

Shelley, like Hazlitt, understands the ambivalent power of the Rousseauan self-esteem, which is double-edged in the sense that it can destroy the self as well as overthrow tyranny. It is this double-edgedness that underlines the Promethean imagery associating Rousseau with Napoleon. Rousseau differs from Napoleon only in the fact that the former is deformed by Life but not chained to the Car as the latter is.

With such an emphatic distinction from all the rest who are enchained to Life, Rousseau attempts strenuously to re-claim sovereignty over himself, which is a claim severely challenged and continuously re-asserted in the course of the poem. An immediate deflection comes as the poet abruptly exclaims:

'Let them pass'--
I cried--'the world and its mysterious doom

³⁹ The interpretation of this syntactically ambiguous passage differs according to which antecedent of 'its object' is chosen. I agree with Bradley that 'its object' refers to the nefarious purposes of life (Bradley, pp. 450-2).

⁴⁰ Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Heritage of Rousseau* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), chapter 2.

'Is not so much more glorious than it was
That I desire to worship those who drew
New figures on its false and fragile glass

'As the old failed' (ll. 243-8).

The poet inadvertently contradicts himself by first dismissing any efforts to change the world as futile and then expressing his admiration for those who still try to bring forth something new. Even the admiration is inevitably foiled because his 'desire' to worship is countered even before it is spoken by a cynicism that sees the world as a 'false and fragile glass', occupying the same ontological plane as the new figures drawn onto it. To this sweeping nihilism, Rousseau replies:

'Figures ever new
Rise on the bubble, paint them *how you may*,
We have but thrown, as those before us threw,

'Our shadows on it as it past away . . .
(ll. 248-251, my emphases).

Rousseau makes a concession to the poet's insight but he subtly re-directs the focus of inquiry by shifting the emphasis onto individuals in the course of history. The poet's cynical remark is a result of detached observation, which is at best a hypothetical vantage point and at worst the expression of a misanthropic indifference and irresponsibility. Rousseau asserts his determination to renew the effort to ameliorate the world as others before him had done, even if their endeavour should come to nothing.⁴¹ Rousseau's assertion reveals a personal struggle to uphold the involuntary vocation that Shelley pronounces for the poet in 'A Defence of Poetry': 'Poets are . . . the

⁴¹ I agree with Rajan's revision of De Man's reading of 'The Triumph'. Rajan argues from this passage on the 'bubble' that new generations of thinkers and poets do bring unique changes to human history. De Man's reading of the poem as a 'synecdoche' (in Rajan's word) of the impossibility of meaning fails to take into account that the succession of the old by the new, or in De Man's words, the process of 'erasure' and 'disfiguration', actually brings forth new possibilities of figures and meaning. See Rajan, *Supplement*, p. 338. De Man, 'Disfigured', pp. 45-6.

mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present' (*SPP*, p. 508).

Rousseau's criterion of the heart opens another perspective on the following groups of the 'mighty phantoms of an elder day', which include Plato and his lover, Aristotle and his pupil Alexander the Great, the 'great bards of old', the 'Anarchs old' and the Popes Gregory and John. These rulers of empires and of thought are once again made indistinguishable from each other, for Bacon's exploration of nature through scientific inquiry, which is thought to transcend the philosophical system of Aristotle, is actually described in a figure not dissimilar to the imperialist expansion of Alexander the Great, whose 'pinion' darkens the world (*ll.* 263-4).

The other [Aristotle] long outlived both woes
and wars,
... and still had kept
The jealous keys of truth's eternal doors

'If Bacon's spirit [] had not leapt
Like lightning out of darkness, he compelled
The Proteus shape of Nature's as it slept

'To wake and to unbar the caves that held
The treasure of the secrets of its reign--
(*ll.* 266-73).

Whether Bacon is included in the procession or exempt from it is hard to tell, though the reference to Bacon is necessary to complete the historical scope of the poem, for he is regarded as the instigator of the scientific Renaissance just as Rousseau, Voltaire and Kant are the leaders of the Enlightenment.⁴² The description of Bacon as a 'spirit leaping out of darkness', together with an earlier manuscript reference to Bacon as a soaring eagle (Reiman, *The Triumph*, p. 241), indicates a recurrent Promethean figure for revolutionary characters, such as the 'sacred few' and Napoleon, Bacon and Rousseau, each exhibiting different facets of Prometheus and enduring injuries of various degrees. The flight of the

⁴² David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth Century Britain* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990), p. 8.

'sacred few' makes the not-yet-blemished Bacon appear deceptively innocent, whereas the appearance of the enchained Napoleon threatens to turn Rousseau's heroic defiance into a childish farce. A positive Prometheus is absent and only emerges as a negation of all these Promethean figures.

Bacon's exploration of nature is soon compared with the exploration of the inner world, a task performed by the 'great bards of old'. Rousseau again asserts himself against his predecessors, who, in his opinion, 'inly quelled / The passions which they sung' so that 'their living melody / Tempers its own contagion to the vein / Of those who are infected with it' (ll. 274-8). Although Rousseau concedes that all poetry is 'contagion', his own work still differs from the rest because he does not succumb to any external concerns, even the response of the reader. His poetry is uncompromisingly honest:

[]I
Have suffered what I wrote, or viler pain!--

'And so my words were seeds of misery--
Even as the deeds of others.'--'Not as theirs,'
I said--he pointed to a company . . .

. . . 'Their power was given
But to destroy,' replied *the leader*--'I
Am one of those who have created, even

'If it be but a world of agony.'--
(ll. 278-282, 292-9, my emphases)

Rousseau's appraisal of the world created out of his writing, 'a world of agony', reveals a vehement self-vindication that is subtly shared by the poet as he shows his approval by changing his address from 'one of the deluded', the 'grim Feature', to 'the leader'. Rousseau has expressed a perennial dream of all poets in maintaining that his words 'were' seeds of misery, rather than decorative devices offering only diversion like the melody of the 'great bards of old'. This is also the attitude of Tasso in Byron's 'The Lament of Tasso'.⁴³ The

⁴³ Shelley's Rousseau comes closer to Byron's Tasso than to Goethe's Tasso. The latter wishes to serve Alphonso and his sisters not only with words but with deeds, in an attempt to make himself comparable to the statesman, Antonio. See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,

discrepancy between intention and action is overcome by Rousseau, as De Man contends ('Disfigured', p. 49), which is an achievement surpassing Count Maddalo's comment on the Maniac's sublimation of his woes: 'Most wretched men / Are cradled into poetry by wrong, / They learn in suffering what they teach in song' (*Julian and Maddalo*, ll. 544-6).

The poet's approval of Rousseau becomes a gesture of solidarity in Reiman's edition. A comparison between the manuscript and Reiman's and Mary's versions reveals that the agreement is not so straightforward as Reiman suggests (Rajan, *Supplement*, pp. 333-4).⁴⁴ Reiman makes the poet play a more active role in soliciting Rousseau's explanation of his own life and preparing both Rousseau and himself for a direct (re-)experience of Rousseau's dream, as the poet reiterates the questions with which he begins the dialogue: "'Whence camest thou & whither goest thou? / How did thy course begin", I said, "& why?"' (ll. 296-7). Rousseau answers in a tentative manner that contrasts with his former vehement attitude of self-vindication.

'Whence I came, partly I seem to know,

'And how and by what paths I have been brought
To this dread pass, methinks even thou mayst
guess;
Why this should be my mind can compass not;

'Whither the conqueror hurries me still less.
But follow thou, and from spectator turn

Torquato Tasso, trans., by John Prudhoe (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1979), ll. 43-9. Lokke points out that Byron's Tasso considers that his poetry exerts an actual influence on history: 'I stoop not to despair; ... / And pour'd my spirit over Palestine, / In honour of the sacred war for him / The God who was on earth and is in heaven' ('The Lament of Tasso', ll. 20-7).

⁴⁴ Rajan explains the nuances distinguishing these three versions. The differences mainly lie in the antecedent of 'theirs' that each version suggests. The original seems to suggest that 'the deeds of despots' are the antecedent of 'theirs'; Mary's version suggests either 'the words of the bards' or 'the deeds of despots'; Reiman's version, with specific quotation marks added to the manuscript, makes it clear that 'theirs' refers to 'the deeds of despots' (*Supplement*, pp. 333-4, 344-5). Mary's version which allows either possibility comes closer to what Shelley attempts to achieve, that is, to distinguish Rousseau from both parties. Reiman's version emphatically dramatises the interaction between the poet and Rousseau, making the poet a quick reader of Rousseau's mind, a gesture of telepathy like Rousseau's at the outset of their encounter. This reading nevertheless makes the poet's final resistance to Rousseau more determined and powerful.

Actor or victim in this wretchedness,
 'And what thou wouldst be taught I then may
 learn
 From thee.--Now listen. . . (ll. 300-8).

The solidarity shown by the poet seems to qualify him, in Rousseau's eyes, to embark on the next stage of his education, which requires him not to 'forbear' to join the dance, but to assume the role of an actor, in explicit opposition to Byron's Childe Harold (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, I, 84)⁴⁵ This active involvement functions as a necessary condition of Rousseau's experience, but it is an involvement in a painstaking meditation on history, rather than a reckless plunge.

II. Vision as Re-Vision

The concentric and parallel structure of the poem, in which the poet's reverie contains Rousseau's reverie, attempts to fulfil Shelley's iconoclastic purpose in presenting vision as re-vision. In other words, the relevance of a vision to our life only emerges in the ceaseless process of revision. Rousseau's reverie temporally precedes the poet's. In the course of the poem, the poet has to recognise the affinity between these two dream visions and is prompted, by the sheer horror of recognising his own destiny in Rousseau's decay, to resist repetition. Ironically in a similar pattern, the constitutive elements of Rousseau's dream are drawn from various recognisable models and assembled only to expose the inadequacy of their precursors.

Rousseau's account of his reverie in 'this valley of perpetual dream' (l. 397) stands as the crux of the poem, holding out clues to every puzzle that the poet

⁴⁵ The context of 'The Triumph' allows us to see Shelley's decision to 'refrain' from participating in actual political activities in a letter to Horace Smith (4 July, 1822, Jones, ii, 442) as an expression of only one mood.

and the reader wish to solve. Rousseau's vision as a whole represents not so much a 'parody', as Bloom considers it, (*Mythmaking*, p. 271) but a radical re-working of the episode of Matilda in Dante's 'Purgatorio'. Shelley constructs his epiphanic episode by making his Rousseau at once repudiate the Wordsworthian myth of innocence and memory and question the virtue of reverie in natural seclusion that Jean-Jacques Rousseau relished in *Rêveries*. The encounter between Rousseau and the Shape all light also functions as a culminating version, so to speak, of recurrent encounters in Shelley's poems. The encounter is modelled on the primal encounter between Cupid and Psycho and on the Faustian quest in Goethe. Shelley's Rousseau as a voluntary victim of the Shape all light in his search for the meaning of life is a damaged Faustian quester. Rousseau's constant effort to re-assert his lost sovereignty also proves his heroic calibre comparable to that of Faust. Besides, Rousseau in 'The Triumph' is a rectified Wandering Poet, rectified in the sense that he manages to gather himself together, though in dismay, at the end of the encounter, unlike the wasted Wandering Poet who is simply consigned to an 'untimely death'. On the other hand, the poet in 'The Triumph' is a mobilised commentator, forever alert to resist an inclination to empathise with Rousseau. Rousseau's reverie questions some fundamental assumptions of its precursors and models; it also poses challenges to the poet's previous vision of the triumphal procession. The poet's resistance to Rousseau's admonition underscores the basic function of repetition in the poem: it works to mobilise the possibility of change.

The short prologue to Rousseau's reverie reveals his still tentative attitude towards his experience. This tentative tone runs counter to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's usually affirmative manner in *Rêveries*. More importantly, it runs counter to Rousseau's earlier confident self-vindication, 'I was overcome / By my own heart alone'. The reverie occurs, like the poet's reverie, at daybreak, and both are modelled on Dante's reverie. The dreamscape at the bottom of a mountain in April constitutes a combined allusion to the foot of the hill where

Dante the pilgrim finds himself 'obscured by a great forest', and where he meets Virgil who guides him to the gates of Hell ('Inferno', I), and to the plain where he explores a 'divine forest' and encounters Matilda ('Purgatorio', XXVIII).⁴⁶ The combined allusion indicates the paradoxical significance of Rousseau's reverie, at once an initiation into an Inferno and a potential passage to a Paradiso. The lush landscape where Rousseau finds himself asleep also disproves the poet's diagnosis in his own vision of the procession that the major fault of the maddening crowd is their ignorance of the fountains and the stream besides their path. For Rousseau starts his journey with an appreciation of nature, which does not exempt him from the wretchedness that he comes to share with the rest of the crowd.

The initial condition when he enters the 'valley of perpetual dream' is oblivion:

'So sweet and deep is the oblivious spell.--
Whether my life had been before that sleep
The Heaven which I imagine, or a Hell

'Like this harsh world in which I wake to weep,
I know not (II. 331-5).

His condition prior to his reverie is suspended between Hell and Heaven, a suspension necessary then for him to be initiated into a new experience and necessary at the time of narration so that he can re-live the experience. No matter how tentative Rousseau's attitude is, he is sure that the oblivious vale has the power to make the poet forget 'thus vainly to deplore / Ills, which if ill, can find no cure from thee' (II. 327-8). In other words, this vale promises, at least in the beginning, comfort even to those who are reluctant to relinquish their moral anguish. But the function of the vale goes beyond that of oblivion, that of a luxuriant refuge that shelters Rousseau from the jarring world outside. His experience in the vale forces him to confront, through direct involvement, the

⁴⁶ Quotations from Dante's trilogy are from Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans., C. H. Sisson (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1993).

harsh reality of life, and forces him to strenuously regain sovereignty over himself.

The encounter between Rousseau and the Shape all light marks an ultimate version of the Shelleyan epiphany. The female charm of the Shape, presiding over the vale like a verdant garden, is reminiscent of the Lady in 'The Sensitive Plant', and of Asia in *Prometheus Unbound*. Rousseau's impulse to pursue her recalls the quest undertaken by the Wandering Poet in *Alastor* and by the poet in *Epipsychidion*. She encompasses all the characteristics of other Shelleyan heroines but differs from them in her explicit potential to subvert and destroy. Her presence and fading away in the combined trope of Lucifer and Venus presents a paradox to ordinary perception. The paradox leads to a clearer understanding as the Shape makes way for the Car of Life. It is a paradox that echoes the double chariots of spring and of autumn in the 'Ode to the West Wind', and the two chariots mounted by Asia and for Demogorgon respectively, and the two chariots in Ione's and Panthea's visions in *Prometheus Unbound*. The association between the Shape all light and the Car of Life, interpreted in the context of the pattern of double chariots recurrent in Shelley's works, presents his ultimate attempt to solve the apparent opposition not through a dialectic synthesis but through an unflinching confrontation with the simultaneous and non-linear co-existence of benevolent and malevolent forces in life.

Critical opinions diverge on the actual significance of the Shape all light but they all recognise her negative potential associated with the Car of Life. The birth, configuration and movement of the Shape all light are represented according to the principle of substitution and in Jerrold Hogle's term, 'transference' (pp. 15-6). She represents a crucial phase in the succession of the guiding spirit(s) in 'The Triumph', just as Matilda serves as the guide in the 'Purgatorio' who supersedes Virgil but will be superseded eventually by

Beatrice.⁴⁷ Her birth and movement enacts and thus helps to foreground the discourse of the poem (Rajan, *Supplement*, p. 326), a process which need not necessarily lead to a denial of the possibility of meaning and reading, as De Man emphatically argues.

A 'gentle trace / Of light diviner than the common Sun / Sheds on the common Earth' (ll. 337-8) ushers in the Shape all light. The reference to the 'common' sun and 'common' earth begins a rebuttal of Wordsworth's grateful celebration in the 'Immortality Ode'. Wordsworth sees the child enter the world 'trailing clouds of glory' only to lose it in 'the light of common day' (ll. 64, 76). Wordsworth finds compensation in the mellow wisdom that he gathers from what remains behind. But Shelley adopts Wordsworth's trajectory back to a glorious infancy only to discover that it is forever irretrievable. Shelley's Rousseau goes through a more tortuous trail of submission, betrayal and realisation and through a more deeply involved reworking of epistemological and philosophical parameters.

The Shape comes into view as the result of the reflection of the sunshine on the waters:

'And as I looked the bright omnipresence
Of morning through the orient cavern flowed,
And the Sun's image radiantly intense

'Burned on the waters of the well that glowed
Like gold, . . .
. . . --there stood

'Amid the sun, as he amid the blaze
Of his glory, on the vibrating
Floor of the fountain, paved with flashing
rays,

'A shape all light, which with one hand did
fling
Dew on the earth, as if she were the Dawn
. . .

And still before her on the dusky grass

⁴⁷ The episode of Matilda appealed to Shelley, who translated part of the passage from Dante. For detailed discussion, see Webb, *The Violet*, pp. 276-336.

Iris her many coloured scarf had drawn.--
(ll. 343-57).

The Shape, springing from the interaction between sunrays and vapour, recalls the pictures of sexual union in *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*, which are characterised by an intermingling of flame and dew. The Venus-figure of the Shape all light also moves in a manner resembling Dante's Matilda. But the Shape all light has another less innocent aspect:

'In her right hand she bore a chrystal glass
Mantling with bright Nepenthe,--the fierce
splendour
Fell from her as she moved under the mass. . .
(ll. 358-60).

The Shape holding a glass mantling with Nepenthe in her right hand conflates Matilda's bearing the waters of the Lethe and the Eunoë, and the evil magician Comus, the son of Circe, the daughter of the sun, in Milton's 'Comus'. Bloom contends that the allusion to 'Comus' identifies the Shape as a seductress of nature (*Mythmaking*, pp. 265, 271). The dubious role of the Shape is implicit in her movement:

'Partly to *tread* the waves with feet which kist
The dancing foam, partly to *glide* along
The airs that roughened the moist amethyst, . . .
(ll. 370-2, my emphases)

The potential danger of 'treading' is for the time being dissolved in her graceful 'gliding along the surface of the lake. But the threat of violence is increasingly explicit:

'Up from the lake a shape of golden dew
Between two rocks, athwart the rising moon,
Dances i' the wind where eagle never flew.--
(ll. 379-81).

As Hillis Miller argues, this picture evoking the birth of Venus actually

expresses the subversive power of the female to efface the male, the sun.⁴⁸ Her subsequent movement seems to bear out Bloom's and Miller's understanding of her as a 'femme fatale':

'And still her feet, no less than the sweet
tune
To which they moved, seemed as they moved, to
blot
The thoughts of him who gazed on them, and soon

'All that was seemed as if it had been not,
As if the gazer's mind was strewn beneath
Her feet like embers, and she, thought by
thought,

'Trampled its fires into the dust of death,
As Day upon the threshold of the east
Treads out the lamps of night, until the
breath

'Of darkness reilluminates even the least
Of heaven's living eyes--like day she came,
Making the night a dream; . . .
(ll. 382-393).

But Bloom's and Miller's description proves to be naive, for she is at once seen as born like Venus and as coming like Day. Both her birth and movement suggest that she represents 'the principle of figuration'.⁴⁹ But she represents a principle of figuration which does not merely depend on the arbitrary and random 'positing' of significance as De Man argues (pp. 62-64, 69), but which works by means of a substitution and transference that enables and ensures the possibility of new significance. The Shape moves within the diurnal circle and changes her identity between Day and Night, between Lucifer and Venus, according to the viewer's perspective.

Rousseau sees her as holding an ultimate answer to the mystery of life:

⁴⁸ Miller extends De Man's argument to add that the Shape not only represents the signifying principle of poetic language and language in general, but the 'drama of sexual desire'. See Hillis J. Miller, *The Linguistic Moment: From Wordsworth to Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), pp. 170-2.

⁴⁹ By figuration, De Man means the element in language that allows for the reiteration of meaning by substitution. He argues that the Shape all light seduces by creating an 'illusion of meaning'. He defines the repetitive process of erasure in the poem by which language performs the 'erasure of its own positions' as 'disfiguration'. See 'Disfiguration', pp. 61, 65.

[']as one between desire and shame
Suspended, I said--"If, as it doth seem,
Thou comest from the realm without a name,

"Into this valley of perpetual dream,
Shew whence I came, and where I am, and why--
Pass not away upon the passing stream"
(*ll.* 394-9).

To Rousseau's Faustian wish for the Spirit of Helen to remain,⁵⁰ the Shape responds with the authority of Dante's Beatrice:

"Arise and quench thy thirst," was her reply.
And as a shut lily, stricken by the wand
Of dewy morning's vital alchemy,

'I rose; and, bending at her sweet command,
Touched with faint lips the cup she raised,
And suddenly my brain became as sand

'Where the first wave had more than half erased
The track of deer on desert Labrador,
Whilst the fierce wolf from which they fled
amazed

'Leaves his stamp visibly upon the shore
Until the second bursts--so on my sight
Burst a new Vision never seen before.--
(*ll.* 400-12).

Rousseau's drinking from the glass of the Shape all light functions as a Faustian pact of initiation, and alludes to the maid's drinking from the nuptial cup before her transformation in Southey's 'Curse of Kehama'.⁵¹ The cause of Rousseau's 'fall', which is a hypothetical condition because he does not have an original innocence before knowing 'shame', lies not in his submission to the lure of the Shape as Bloom and Hillis J. Miller insist for their different reasons, or in his submission to the lure of the world as Duffy (p. 132) and Reiman (*The Triumph*, p. 318) suggest, finding an allusion to Rousseau's brief period of debauchery in

⁵⁰ Shelley quoted 'Remain, thou art so beautiful' (*Faust*, II, v, vi) in a letter to John Gisborne describing his time with the Williamses (18 June, 1822), Jones, ii 436

⁵¹ The Maniac in *Julian and Maddalo* also refers to the image of the cup to express a desire for union and its distorted frustration; 'Mix them up / Like self-destroying poisons in one cup' (*ll.* 435-6).

Paris, but in his mistaken notion of the Shape as the 'unitary' depository of significance (Rajan, *Supplement*, p. 336), and as the ultimate answer to life. She plays the role of an intermediary, like Matilda in the 'Purgatorio', preparing Rousseau for the Car of Life. The latent violence of her movement, gliding-treading-trampling, exerts an impact on Rousseau that he experiences as an obliterating process that mimes the succession of visions.⁵² The 'trampling' feet of the Shape all light do not usher in the 'white radiance of Eternity' that is released unstained by Death in 'Adonais' (*ll.* 462-4), or lead to a vision of the history of the Roman Catholic church as in the 'Paradiso'. Instead, she brings forth a Car whose 'cold bright' light (*l.* 434) deforms everything in its way. The violent process of signification is represented in a similar way to the inevitable violence of hermeneutics in Dante's trilogy, in which Dante's passage across Malebolge (from the abyss to the eighth circle of the Hell) on the back of Geryon symbolises and enacts the difficult transition from one mode of interpretation to another.⁵³ But unlike in Dante's trilogy, the Shape all light does not disappear but only fades in the presence of the 'severe excess' of the Car's light:

'More dimly than a day appearing dream,
The ghost of a forgotten form of sleep,

⁵² The movement of the Shape alludes to the movement of the Goddess Calamity in *The Illiad* (XIX, 92-3), which is quoted in Plato's 'Symposium'. Shelley's translation of this passage is as follows: "There were need of some poet like Homer to celebrate the delicacy and tenderness of Love. For Homer says, that the Goddess Calamity is delicate, and that her feet are tender. "Her feet are soft," he says, "for she treads not upon the ground, but makes her path upon the heads of men." . . . For Love walks not upon the earth, nor over the heads of men, . . . but he dwells within, and treads on the softest of existing things' (Notopoulos, p. 435). Shelley seems to be fascinated by the idea of the gentle movement of feet, which also characterises the Lady in 'The Sensitive Plant' (*l.* 102-5). In 'Defence', he uses the same image to describe an 'interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own', whose 'footsteps are like those of a wind over a sea' (*SPP*, p. 504). But in 'The Triumph' the ambiguous nature of this allusion is explored.

⁵³ William Franke points out that Dante upholds a 'millenary tradition' that represents 'impasse as the situation out of which the need for and call to hermeneutics arises'. The three most illustrative episodes in the trilogy are the episode of Medusa in which vision transcends literal sight ('Inferno', IX), the episode of Geryon, which carries Dante and Virgil across an aporia ('Inferno', XVII), and the episode of Ulysses, in which hermeneutics functions as it is originally called forth to reach or to be reached by an Other ('Inferno', XXVI). Franke, pp. 5-7, 17.

A light from Heaven whose half extinguished
beam

'Through the sick day in which we wake to weep
Glimmers, forever sought, forever lost.--
So did that shape its obscure tenour keep

'Beside my path, as silent as a ghost; . . .
(*ll.* 427-431).

The simultaneous existence of the Shape all light and the Car of Life explains the dual identity of the Shape (and the Car) as both Lucifer and Venus, both day and dream. The 'savage music', the 'tempest of the splendour', and the pavilion decorated with the plumes of Iris, evince the identity of the Shape and the Car. Rousseau's vision of the Car arrives as if it was an original version of the poet's vision, as the fading Shape '[g]limmers' beside Rousseau in the same way as at the threshold of the poet's vision the hills 'glimmer' under a 'veil of light' (*l.* 33). The shapes within the two Cars are described in the same set of rhymes: 'form-storm-deform' (*ll.* 84-86-88; 464-466-468). Rousseau's vision is thus presented as a duplicated exposure of the two visions. In narrating his own vision, Rousseau conflates the two visions on the same temporal plane. As a consequence, the Car gains a fiercer force and the frenzy of the crowd increases:

[']the crew
Seemed in that light like atomies that dance
Within a sunbeam.--Some upon the new

'Embroidery of flowers that did enhance
The grassy vesture of the desert, played,
Forgetful of the chariot's swift advance; . . .
(*ll.* 445-50)

The Car appears to wield a mysterious power over its followers as invincible as the power of the Brahmins' Juggernaut in *Queen Mab* (VII, 33-36). But the Car in 'The Triumph' is more threatening because it not only inspires a Dionysian worship but does so in a gently alluring manner. Rousseau can no longer refrain from joining the dance. In fact, he is involuntarily 'swept' along

with the crowd. However, a desperate re-assertion of power over himself is necessary in order to set himself apart from the crowd.

[']I among the multitude
Was swept; me sweetest flowers delayed
not long,
Me not the shadow nor the solitude,

'Me not the falling stream's Lethean song,
Me, not the phantom of that early form
Which moved upon its motion,--but among

'The thickest billows of the living storm
I plunged, and bared my bosom to the clime
Of that cold light, whose airs too soon
deform-- (ll. 460-8).

This almost melodramatic reiteration of self-distinction at once establishes and undermines his heroic stature, even despite his own will. The vindictive tone is reminiscent of that in *The Confessions*. His actual participation allows him to place his experience in a literary-historical perspective in which he begins to see his vision as comparable to that of Dante, as he points out to the poet: 'Behold a wonder worthy of the rhyme / Of him who from the lowest depths of Hell / Through every Paradise and through all glory / Love led serene' (ll. 471-4). The major difference between them is that Dante returns unscathed to tell 'In words of hate and awe the wondrous story / How all things are transfigured, except Love; . . . The world can hear not the sweet notes that move / The sphere whose light is melody to lovers' (ll. 475-80). Dante turns from a being a spectator in the Inferno to an actor in the Purgatorio, and his experience in the Purgatorio prepares him for the highest vision in the Paradiso. In a similar movement from spectator to actor, Rousseau is 'deformed' and forced to realise that the Paradiso only exists in the 'intense inane' which must remain 'unascended'. Nevertheless, he is privileged to take notice of the 'sweet notes' that move the spheres, but which will remain unheeded by the world.

The realisation enables Rousseau to detect not only the evanescent nature of the Car and its followers but the chimerical and corrupting nature of the

phenomenal world. The grove gradually grows dense with shadows and phantoms diffused incessantly from the crowd, bestowing confusion and blindness on others and on themselves, creating a kind of simulacrum. It is also a simulacrum in Jean Baudrillard's sense, for it presents a profoundly confused picture in which the original version of things is already an imitation. The historical perspective that Rousseau gains allows him to see the 'topical satire' on empire and civilisation (Jones, *Satire*, p. 161) when the shadows assume the forms of predators and scavengers that allude to the destruction wrought by those who wield power:

[']the old anatomies
 ...
 laughed from their dead eyes
 To reassume the delegated power
 Arrayed in which these worms did monarchize
 'Who make this earth their charnel.--
 (II. 500-5).

Images of decay, corruption, pusillanimity, confusion, deception and blindness swarm into view in a crescendo that ends in collapse. Rousseau gradually becomes aware of the source of the general commotion as if the Lethean waters that he drank from the cup did contain the water of the Euonē as well, the former allowing him to forget his sins and the latter to recover all the good in his memory. The movement of the verse enacts the swirling dance and growing avalanche:

[']each one
 Of that great crowd sent forth incessantly
 These shadows, numerous as the dead leaves
 blown
 'In Autumn evening from a poplar tree--
 Each, like himself and like each other were,
 At first, but soon distorted, seemed to be
 'Obscure clouds moulded by the casual air;
 ...
 'As the sun shapes the clouds--thus, on the way

Mask after mask fell from the countenance
And form of all, . . .

And some grew weary of the ghastly dance

'And fell, as I have fallen by the way side, . . .
(II. 526-41).

The deformed Rousseau is in fact abandoned by the Car and its followers because of his weariness. A passage in the manuscript suggests a reason for his collapse. After line 541, there is a sentence, 'Alas I kiss you [Julie]', as Reiman deciphers it (Reiman, *The Triumph*, p. 211). The position of the reference to *Julie*, at the end of the 'ghastly dance', corresponds to the position of the manuscript reference to Jane Williams, between the young and old dancers in the poet's vision. The correspondence locates the power of these two visions in the intertwined relationship between private passions and public aspirations. Rousseau's novel ends with Julie's confession of her love for St Preux on her death bed, without divulging St Preux's response. Looking back at her faithful married life, Julie comes to the conclusion that all is but illusion:

je me suis longtemps fait illusion. Cette illusion me fut salutaire; elle se détruit au moment que je n'en ai plus besoin. Vous m'avez crue guérie, et j'ai cru l'être. Rendons grâce à celui qui fit durer cette erreur autant qu'elle était utile . . . Oui, j'eus beau vouloir étouffer le premier sentiment qui m'a fait vivre, il s'est concentré dans mon coeur (*Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. ii, 740-1).⁵⁴

This final letter ends with a relief in a hope of reunion:

La vertu qui nous sépara sur la terre nous unira dans le séjour éternel. Je meurs dans cette douce attente: trop heureuse d'acheter au prix de ma vie le droit de t'aimer toujours sans crime, et de te le dire encore une fois! (*Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol.ii, 743).⁵⁵

⁵⁴ 'Long have I indulged myself in the salutary delusion, that my passion was extinguished, the delusion is now vanished, when it can be no longer useful. You imagined me cured of my love; I thought so too. Let us thank heaven that the deception that lasted as long as it could be of service to us. In vain, alas! I endeavoured to stifle that passion which inspired me with life; *Eloisa: or A Series of Original Letters*, 4 vols., trans., by William Kenrick (London: T. Beckett, 1776), vol. iv, 244-5.

⁵⁵ 'That virtue, which separated us on earth, will unite us for ever in the mansions of the blessed. I die in that peaceful hope; too happy to purchase, at the expense of my life, the privilege of loving you without crime, and of telling you so once more!' *Eloisa*, vol. iv,

By letting Rousseau exclaim: 'Alas I kiss you Julie', Shelley attempts to give a voice to St Preux who remains silent after rejecting Julie's proposal of marriage with Clare and living with the Wolmars at Clarens. This exclamation registers Shelley's understanding of the personal allusions in *Julie* to Rousseau's own affair with Madame d'Houdetot, an understanding which also underscores his own personal concerns at the time of composing 'The Triumph', that is, his intense feeling towards Jane Williams.

The fragments of the lyric poems for Jane Williams inserted in the poet's vision reveal some aspects of his repressed feeling towards Jane as characterised by the 'maniac dance' of the crowd, that is, the lovers' headlong plunge into consuming passions like moths despite apparent dangers. In the background of these passages there is a disquieting mood that robs the poet of peace. Another poem written around the same period, the 'Lines: When the Lamp is Shattered', includes an allusion to Dante's whirlwind,⁵⁶ '[the] passions will rock thee / As the storms rock the ravens on high' (ll. 25-6).⁵⁷ The poet in the 'Lines Written at the Bay of Lerici' seeks for some medicine to soothe '[s]uch sweet and bitter pain as [his]', a remedy promised by the vessels gliding like 'spirit-winged chariots' from 'some Elysian star' across 'the ocean bright and wide' back to the 'twinkling bay' of Lerici (ll. 30-44). Suddenly the bay becomes a slaughter house.

And the fisher with his lamp
And spear about the low rocks damp
Crept, and struck the fish which came
To worship the delusive flame (ll. 51-4).

Like the recurrent Shelleyan hero, the fish seem to search for a 'fiery sepulchre'

248.

⁵⁶ In 1814, Shelley used the episode of Paolo and Francesca ('Inferno', V) to refer to his love for Mary, see *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed., Marion Kingston Stocking (Harvard UP, 1968), p. 62.

⁵⁷ For Shelley's lyric poems, see Judith Chernaik, *The Lyrics of Shelley* (Clevedon: the Press of Case Western Reserve U, 1972)

(*Epipsychidion*, l. 223), much in the same way as the dancers exhaust themselves in the 'savage music' and 'unholy leisure'. Similarly, Rousseau complies with the 'sweet command' of the Shape all light and plunges into the 'living storm'.

The juxtaposition of Rousseau's vision of the world and his address to Julie intensifies the relationship between Rousseau and the poet. Rousseau's tone and gesture prompt the poet's immediate objection. Rousseau's remark after the departure of the vision strikes a different note from the self-assertion before 'plunging' into the storm.

'Then, what is Life?' I said . . . *the cripple*
cast
His eye upon the car which now had rolled
Onward, as if that look must be the last,

And answered. . . 'Happy those for whom the
fold
Of (ll. 544-8, my emphases).

His final glance at the departing Car, in the poet's eyes, might recall the dying glare of the bereft lioness, in which hope once shone (ll. 524-6). His serener tone, 'Happy those . . .', alludes back to the writer of *Rêveries*, and suggests the previous passages on chimeras might be a dark parody of Rousseau's reveries in which Rousseau builds himself a delightful world of chimeras.⁵⁸ These two allusions, together with the address, 'the cripple', express the poet's resistance and contempt accumulated in the course of Rousseau's narration, a strongly negative feeling which grows out of the horror of recognising the similarities between Rousseau's and his own situation.

As the poet stands on the Apennine mountain top viewing the sunrise, 'The Triumph of Life' stands at the summit of Shelley's career investigating the high and low, the ebb and flow of his thought, imagery and fortune. Shelley uses the

⁵⁸ See the first book of *The Confessions*, and the first walk of *The Reveries*.

structure of the dialogue to embark on a comprehensive examination of his cultural, historical and literary heritage and examines his own poetic achievement in the light of that heritage. The dialogic structure of the poem reveals a similar kind of 'mental anguish' to that which permeates Rousseau's work (Kelly, 252). It is a mental anguish that prompts Shelley like Rousseau to conduct a dialogue by projecting adverse opinions onto an interlocutor and attempting by argument and persuasion to disprove and appropriate the potential adversaries. Shelley masters the dialogic structure by modifying the Rousseauian model with a Dantean one, which emphasises a progressive interaction between the guide and the pilgrim, and which allows the pilgrim to surpass the guide in due course. Rousseau, being a tutelary spirit in this comprehensive examination of history, is moulded into a composite figure with qualities of historical characters towards whom Shelley's attitude is ambivalent. In this sense, Rousseau, as Monika Lee remarks (p. 247), functions as a 'vehicle' but not an 'embodiment'.

The dialogic structure is enriched by the concentric and parallel reveries. Rousseau's reverie, (what I have called 'vision as re-vision'), enframèd within the poet's reverie, (what I have called 'vision as remembrance'), serves as a duplicate exposure of the two, an uncanny doubleness which reveals a non-linear and simultaneous existence in both spatial and temporal terms. The double perspective is further complicated by the juxtapositions of apparently contradictory passages in the manuscript. The unresolved conflicts between them frustrate the reader's expectation for a coherent resolution but ensure new possibilities of reading and meaning. Two among the juxtapositions of materials from other poems in the manuscript, the lyric passages for Jane and the exclamation of Rousseau for Julie, reveal the entangled impulses linking private passions and public aspirations, an entanglement sanctioned in Dante's works. Shelley, in 'Defence', praises the *Vita Nuova* together with the 'Paradiso', as serving the 'supreme cause' of love, which is the primary motor for human

progress (*SPP*, p. 497). But in 'The Triumph', Shelley continues Dante's exploration into the ambivalent function of his own lyrical poems as he expresses deep feelings towards Paolo and Francesca ('Inferno', V), and into the compellingly darker side of passion. Furthermore, Shelley redresses Dante's progressive trilogy by forcing his pilgrim-questers to confront their hard-won position in a Purgatorio and by acknowledging that the Paradiso remains forever unattainable.

Shelley's pilgrim-questers, unlike the 'redeemed sinners' in Dante's 'Purgatorio', are vehemently unrepentant. The final position that Rousseau achieves, 'fallen by the way side', is also the position from which the poet sets out on his quest. Both imply an estrangement and detachment from the multitude. But Rousseau's position is won through direct involvement, whereas the poet is yet to begin his own expedition. The poet's never-slackening resistance to Rousseau actually reveals Shelley's self criticism of his own tendency to search for a retreat. It is a vigilance that enables him to outgrow the mixed admiration and reproach that the Narrator feels for the Wandering Poet in *Alastor*. It is also a vigilance that grows all the more stringent as he recognises his own fate in the retired Rousseau and Wordsworth. It is not enough that Rousseau arrives at the position where he can celebrate himself as having surpassed the repentant Prometheus: 'I would fain / Be what it is my destiny to be, / The saviour and the strength of suffering man' (*Prometheus Unbound*, I, 815-7). It is still not enough that he has become a 'living sepulchre' of himself through a pursuit of his ideal, an ironic victim of the Shelleyan credo as Shelley expounds it in the essay 'On Love'.⁵⁹ Rousseau is rejected with a stridency that inevitably recalls Shelley's similar, and similarly over-emphatic, rejection of Wordsworth. As Wordsworth celebrates his own heroic compliance with the earthly world, 'This earth / Which is the world of all of us

⁵⁹ The connection is suggested by Peter Vassallo, 'From Petrarch to Dante: the Discourse of Disenchantment in Shelley's "The Triumph of Life"', *Anglo-Italian Studies*, vol. 1 (1991), 102-10, p. 109

and where / We find our happiness or not at all',⁶⁰ and as Wordsworth eulogises the rich recompense of age and the 'philosophic mind' ('Immortality Ode', *l.* 189), Shelley still clings to his own verdict on this once admired Poet of nature, 'he is a slave' (Mary, *Journal*, i, 25).

In 'The Triumph', Shelley presents his conclusive diagnosis of the crucial historical crisis of his own time, a diagnosis penetrating into the heart of historical progress and turmoil. His models, Dante and Rousseau, lead him to see the core of these ills in the individuals whose self-knowledge is insufficient to guide them, as well as in the institutions which constrict and retard real amelioration. In the end, the place that Shelley allocates for his pilgrim-questers is that of Dante's desert ('Inferno', I, 64),⁶¹ a place of an essentially purgatorial character where visionary encounters occur and decisions are required. The ending of the poem as it now stands repudiates the reading that finds spiritual quietism and immanent apocalypse, advanced by Abrams, and a reading that finds an acquiescence in the random arbitrariness of signification, advanced by De Man as well as the reading that understands the poem as figuring the inevitable triumph of language advanced by Miller. The ending of the poem does not however fully support Reiman's optimistic insistence that it ends in a vision of the 'folding star'.⁶² Shelley, having repudiated both the Apollonian order as inadequate and the Dionysian order as destructive, renews his rejection of the resigned attitude shown by Rousseau in order to suggest that the purgatorial desert is the only place for those who wish to overcome their detached misanthropy by plunging into the 'living storm' and who still uphold the possibility of a vision different from the deceptive inferno.

⁶⁰ This passage was first published in *The Friend* (26 October, 1809), later included in the collected edition of *The Poems* (1815), and is quoted in Shelley's letter to John Gisborne (10 April, 1822), Jones, ii, 406-7.

⁶¹ For the image of Dante's desert as an emblem of history, see Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in 'The Divine Comedy'*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979), p. 12.

⁶² Reiman considers that the last line of the manuscript, 'Happy those for whom the fold / Of indicates a 'sheepfold' in an allusion to 'the folding-star' in Milton's 'Comus' (*l.* 93), an enclosure that suggests the hope of salvation (Reiman, *The Triumph*, p. 83).

Conclusion

The course of Shelley's literary reputation fluctuates according to the shifts of dominant critical criteria. In Shelley's life time and shortly after his death, the polarised opinions held by his friends and his detractors responded to what lies at the centre of Shelley's literary career, that is, the political efficacy and historical responsibility of the poet and his poetry. However, critics of a later age who read Shelley as purely a lyric poet, such as Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis, neglect this crucial foundation of Shelley's poetry. On the other hand, critics who contributed to the re-discovery of Shelley as a philosophical poet, such as Pulos and Wasserman, forget that Shelley's central concern as a poet lay in his attempts to approximate before-unapprehended truths and beauty, which reaches beyond the confines of any coherent metaphysical system. The debate between those who represent Shelley as a Platonic poet and those who represent him as a radical poet hinges on our understanding of 'The Triumph of Life'. Critical opinions vary radically, but all share Hazlitt's apprehension that Death reigns in the paradoxical triumphal procession of Life. This thesis argues that neither a reading that finds in the poem a confession of despair, nor a reading that finds in it a reassertion of an optimistic idealism is adequate to account for the complexities of the poem itself. I have attempted to avoid such over-simplification and to seek an interpretation of this ambiguous fragment through a thorough discussion of Shelley's career as a whole.

In this final major literary endeavour, Shelley attempts to negotiate between conflicting forces recurrent and inherent in his poetic work, that is, the conflict between the public aspiration for political reform and the private dream of retreat into a secluded paradise. The negotiation takes place within a concentric reverie which includes a dialogue with Rousseau at its centre. Rousseau, as a composite figure, comprehends aspects of the Romantic conception of the visionary manqué, whose Promethean endeavour to direct the world towards enlightenment ironically causes irrevocable disasters, among which most poignantly in Shelley's age is the French

Revolution. The dramatised responses ranging from reproach, to awe and approval manifested by the poet towards Rousseau reflect Shelley's attitude not only towards the legacy of the Enlightenment but also towards his own role as a poet in the post-Napoleonic era. The mode of dialogue, which itself echoes the very different practices of both Rousseau and Dante, enables Shelley to conduct an investigation that encompasses both a grand historical panorama and the hidden recesses of the individual psyche. The 'mutiny' and unquiet longing of the latter is seen as the primary motor both of historical turmoil and historical progress. The intertwined investigation of history and the psyche is further complicated by a non-linear concept of time suggested by the parallel structure of the reveries. The poet, in his dream, sees his own dream repeated by Rousseau's dream, which temporally precedes his, and yet he insistently refuses to re-enact Rousseau's fate. This refusal serves as the main foundation of the argument of the thesis. It is a refusal that reveals a horror of recognising his possible fate in Rousseau's, and that reveals a resurgent energy to fight against the contentment and despondency that Shelley sees Rousseau paradoxically embody. It is a refusal through which Shelley identifies himself as a purgatorial poet, a poet who must agree to suffer infernal nightmares, and a poet who must accept in addition that paradise is forever unattainable. In the end, Shelley comes to realise that 'exile', a condition that came to define for him not only his geographical but his moral and political position, was not so much a predicament that he was fated to suffer, but rather the one possible perspective available to a poet who occupied Shelley's particular historical moment, the one perspective from which it was possible for a poet who lived in a bad time to achieve an authentic imaginative vision.

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